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OR,

SURE-SHOT, The High-Flyer.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "BUFFALO BILL" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE YOUNG HIGH-FLYER.

"The boy's a high-flyer and no mistake, but I reckon as how his chips has been called in, this time."

"I dunno, pard, fer ther devil takes keer

BUFFALO BILL SWOOPED LOW FROM HIS SADDLE, AND WITH HIS LEFT
HAND GRASPED THE YOUTH.

o' his own, so they says, and maybe he'll come out O. K."

"Yer is ruther hard on ther kid, pard, fer I don't think he is sich a all-fired bad one."

"Th'n yer don't know him, Pete, that's all."

"I think I do, for I has seen men as was man-killers go to call him down on several occasions, and miss it, fer he didn't come down worth a cent."

"I seen thet Mexican terror, El Paso Ed, when ther boy accused him of cheatin' a tenderfoot gent, go to spank him for bein' too fresh, as he said; but ther boy put him ter bed with a bullet in his shoulder, and made him give up ther boodle he hed won from ther stranger."

"No, he's a Highflyer, and no mistake, fer a kid o' tender years, but he hain't half bad, as I judges him."

"Well, he's gone up, this time, Pete Pomeroy, and I'll gamble on it."

"Put up yer money, then."

"It's up; a cool fifty pesos."

"And mine covers it, thet ther boy gits back O. K."

"Which I bets he don't."

"Now, here comes Fred Foster, and he'll hold ther stakes."

"Say, pards, let's make a pool of ther bet, for thar is some as says ther boy will git back, and some as says he won't; so each one put in fifty, or more, if yer thinks best, and them as wins takes ther pot."

This proposition was hailed as just the thing, and a dozen men chipped in their money to make the purse, when Nick Nubbins called out:

"Who says ther boy gits back, and who says he don't?"

The hands held up against the boy's return were twelve, while only one was raised, when called upon, who believed in the return in safety of the young Highflyer from the expedition he had gone upon.

"Why, this just makes us git our money back even, if you wins, Pete Pomeroy, for you stands agin us all, while, if we loses, you gits ther whole stake!" cried Nick Nubbins.

"Then I matches ther amount agin yer all," and Pete Pomeroy's words were greeted with a yell by half a hundred men.

"What is the game, gentlemen?" asked one who had just entered the large saloon where all were gathered, and whose appearance indicated a man whose position in life had been above that of those about him.

"You is to hold the stakes, Mr. Foster," said Nick Nubbins, addressing the one who had asked the question.

"I am willing; but what is the game?"

"It's for and agin thet young Highflyer, Little Sure Shot, gittin' back from his durn fool trail to rescue Diablo Dick o' Arizona, whom nobody would cry fer if he got kilt, and who isn't wanted round here, though thet kid would go ter help him out."

"What danger is Diablo Dick in?" asked Fred Foster, and he added: "You know I have been away for a week."

"Well, he went up inter ther Blue Hills country ter hunt, as he allus does each year, and a cowboy come in three days ago and reports thet a band o' Comanches was seen follerin' a trail right up thar. Ther boy heerd it, and said as how he'd go and warn Diablo Dick o' his danger, and off ther young Highflyer starts, and we is bettin' he never gits back," explained Nick Nubbins.

"And if he don't, and Diablo Dick, too, it will be a blessin' to this community," growled one.

A number agreed with him as to the

man, though not one had a word to say against the boy.

"Well, gentlemen," said Fred Foster, quietly, "I admit that Diablo Dick is a hard citizen—a very hard citizen, indeed; but I recall that he saved that boy's life once when there were half a dozen cowardly men, some of them now present, who sought to drive him out of this settlement, and Little Sure Shot is one, as I know him, not to forget a wrong or a favor done him; so he went to help the man who had befriended him in the hour of need."

"It is betting on a human life, but gambling is my game, you know, and if you'll all double your bets I'll match them, and go in with Pete Pomeroy on the purse, while Tom Totten can hold the stakes."

This proposition of Fred Foster was received with a cheer. The men interested at once doubled their bets, and others asked to come into the game, until the gambler and Pete Pomeroy, the only ones betting on the boy's return, stood to win or lose a large amount of money.

Tom Totten, the keeper of the combined saloon and gambling den known as the "Win or Lose Palace," was given the purse, and then Gambler Fred invited the crowd to "have something," not one of them refusing to step briskly up to the long bar.

But the eyes of the gambler were upon four of the party who had accepted his invitation, and all saw that he had something to say, from the look he gave them as they joined the others. A silence immediately fell upon the crowd—a silence ominous of a coming storm.

CHAPTER II.

FRED FOSTER, THE STRANGER SPORT.

A few moments before giving the invitation to the crowd to step up to the bar, Fred Foster had spoken of several men who were making a cowardly attack upon the young Highflyer, when the desperado, Diablo Dick, had taken the boy's part. He had noticed the presence of these men there in the saloon.

In response to his invitation, among the fifty who accepted with alacrity, were four who stood together, and upon whom the eyes of the gambler were riveted.

They were hard-looking customers, with the air of men who were ready for a fight, footrace, or funeral. They were the ones, as all knew, to whom Gambler Fred had referred as cowards.

The hum of voices had quickly ceased, for all realized that the sport had something to say, and would say it.

Those in the settlement of San Gabriel, where men walked by day and slept by night with their guns on, and hands on them ready for quick use, knew the gambler only as he had signed himself on the register of the San Gabriel Inn—once an old mission—for he wrote himself down as:

"Fred Foster, Gentleman."

He had ridden into the San Gabriel settlement without a guide, and alone, and drove ahead of him four well-laden pack horses, each one as fine an animal as the superb horse upon which he was mounted.

He was dressed in black broadcloth, the pants stuck in handsome top-boots, the heels of which were armed with gold spurs.

He wore a belt of arms beneath his frock coat, which he left open at times, and his white shirt and silk scarf gave him a striking appearance among men who dressed as miners, cowboys, and in the general frontier garb.

His hat was a large-brimmed, black slouch, and with his clean-shaven face and sombre attire, he might have been mistaken for an itinerant parson, but for his strikingly handsome face, glittering white teeth and burning black eyes, intense in their expression when excited—the only sign of excitement he ever revealed, as he was always outwardly calm, and spoke with a slight drawl.

It was days before any one knew what had brought Fred Foster, Gentleman, to San Gabriel, and much curiosity was shown regarding him, for he had taken the best room in the mission—which had then become an inn—as his own, and from the packs which the animals had brought, had fitted it up handsomely, buying Navajo blankets and Mexican mats to add to its comfort and somewhat elegant appearance.

He had never been known to take a drink, but was fond of a cigar, and had made himself at once popular by his fine voice and clever performance upon the guitar and violin, which instruments he had with him, along with a small library of choice books.

"Well, I guess he's right; he's a gentleman, he is," was the comment of Pete Pomeroy, miner, when the stranger had been a couple of weeks in San Gabriel.

But one night it was found that he was also a sport, for going into the Win and Lose Saloon while a game for large stakes was being played between a professional sharp and a young miner, when the latter was bluffed off from a big bet by the professional, both gambler and bully, Fred Foster had said, in his quiet way:

"Don't let him bluff you off, for my money is yours to any amount."

All looked at him in amazement, the young miner particularly being surprised, and answering quickly:

"I thank you, sir, but I had no right to play, for I cannot afford to lose money; and only took a hand because I got a letter from home asking for a certain sum to lift a mortgage for my father, and I hoped to win it, but now have lost all I had."

"Playin' ther baby act," growled Card Sharp Cal, his adversary.

"No, he is doing right; but, if he wishes to meet your bluff he can get the money," Fred Foster retorted.

"Maybe you'd like to take the contract off his hands," intimated the sharp, rather insolently.

"With pleasure; just where he leaves off, and play the game to win or lose, as his pard."

"But, I have no more money, sir," the young miner urged, excitedly.

"I have, and take your hand, but upon one condition."

"What is it, sir?"

"That you never play another card!"

"Gladly, I grant it, sir!"

"Now, sir, to the game," and Fred Foster, Gentleman, faced the professional.

"I'm ready, but I warns you I don't stand no nonsense. Business is business with me, every time."

"Oh, is it? Well, so let it be! You raised his bet, I believe, to double?"

"I did, but I double that, now."

"And I meet you."

"Then I double that again."

"And I meet you."

"Ag'in I doubles you," cried the card sharp, excitedly.

"Well, I'll double your bet," was the surprising response of Fred Foster, now the Stranger Sport, and all who heard his calmly uttered announcement drew a long breath of expectancy.

That was "business" indeed.

CHAPTER III.

A GAME OF DEATH.

Not a word was said among those gathered about the two card players, for all other players in the saloon had dropped their games when Fred Foster took a hand.

His last remark to Card Sharp Cal, who was an acknowledged sharper, as we have said, and a bully as well, raised the sum on the board to a large amount, something over two thousand dollars, which one or the other must win or lose.

Fred Foster's raising the bet as he did somewhat startled the gambler, and he looked uneasy, glanced about him as though seeking for help, and shuffled his cards uneasily.

He made no immediate response; then he spoke in a manner meant to intimidate:

"I has the money to bet, and you makes a mistake if you is bluffin', simply hoping to win, and no dust to pay with if you lose."

Foster did not take his eyes off the man, but asked, in a loud tone:

"As I am a stranger here, Mr. Totten, please say to this gentleman that I am not beyond my limit in betting a few thousand."

"Indeed you are not, and I'll vouch for you for far more money," announced Tom Totten, coming up to the table.

"Now, gentlemen," continued Foster, "if this player does not dare venture more money on his hand, let him say so, and we will know who wins."

"I puts another thousand on," responded Card Sharp Cal, boldly.

"And I will double the entire amount," from the unmoved stranger.

"I is with you, and calls you!" came from the sharper, and both hands were revealed.

A perfect yell went up that nearly raised the roof, for both hands were identical.

"Four aces and the ten of diamonds is my hand," announced the Stranger Sport.

"Then you is a durned cheat, for I holds four aces and a ten of diamonds!" shouted the gambler.

"One moment, sir, and we will test this, right here, and the guilty man must answer to the other," and deliberately Foster took up the cards save those displayed.

"Mr. Totten, take at random any of my cards, and see if they match the rest of the pack."

Tom Totten took out two, the ace of hearts and the ten of diamonds, while Fred Foster said, quickly:

"You leave your cards on that table, sir, or I'll send a bullet through your brain. My honor is at stake now, sir."

Card Sharp Cal had turned white, but he obeyed, and sat in silence, as though watching his chance to draw his gun, or to get the cards off the table.

"These cards and those in the pack are the same, Mr. Foster," said Tom Totten, and several others seconded his assertion.

"Now the other three, please."

They, too, were examined, and Tom Totten and those he called to his aid proclaimed that the five cards given up by Fred Foster belonged to the pack.

"Now the cards of this man, please," said Foster.

They were taken up and examined closely.

They appeared to be identical with the others, until a difference was at last discovered, ever so slight, yet existing and apparent.

"Gentlemen, those five cards do not belong to the pack," announced Tom Totten.

No one then doubted that the card sharp had played a bold game to win by fraud, and had been caught at it.

"Rope him!" cried a voice, and instantly others seconded the idea, but Foster demurred, quietly saying:

"No; for it was agreed that the one found to be a cheat was answerable to the other.

"He accused me of cheating, and it has now been proven that his words are applicable only to himself.

"He would have cheated that young miner, my pard, in this game, and then have killed him to cover up his own rascality, but I chipped in. Now, sir, you are answerable to me!"

The card sharp, livid with rage, arose to his feet, and drew his revolver as he did so, the crowd scattering hurriedly out of the way.

But the Stranger Sport did not move, and the young miner, Matt Armstrong, stood by his side.

As he arose the card sharp seized the chair in which he had been seated, and hurled it at Foster, who, with a skill that won loud applause, caught it, tossed it to one side, and his revolver flashed as did that of his foe.

The card sharp was known to be a dead shot, and his miss now was but a hair's breadth, yet it was a miss, the bullet grazing the temple of Fred Foster, who made himself solid then and there in that community, by placing a ball right between the eyes of his adversary!

"Bury him at my expense, Mr. Totten, and put this money in your strong box, half to my credit, half to the call of my partner in the game, this young miner here.

"Gentlemen, all, take a drink with me," and wholly at his ease, the Stranger Sport turned to the bar, raising his black slouch hat courteously in acknowledgment of the rousing cheers that were given for him by every man present.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LINKS OF A CHAIN.

Such, as related in the foregoing chapter, was the way in which Fred Foster, the Stranger Sport, rendered himself "solid" in San Gabriel settlement.

In New Mexico the settlement was located, in the midst of mountains and valleys, the former rich in gold and silver, the latter affording splendid pasturage for cattle. The settlement community of a thousand souls was made up of miners, cattlemen, and hangers-on about a Wild Western camp, most of them reckless spirits, ripe for adventure, excitement, fun or a rope rustle.

Americans and Mexicans predominated, but there were Indians, a few negroes, a dozen or more Chinese, and then a mixture of the races of Europe; all together a rather desperate lot of men.

Several stores, twice as many saloons and gambling dens, a blacksmith shop, and the San Gabriel Mission, transformed into an inn, made up the settlement proper, with ranches scattered through the valleys and mining camps through the adjacent mountains.

Road agents, Comanches, cattle and horse thieves, were to be feared at all times, and this fact but added greater lawlessness to the community.

Yet in San Gabriel there were a few in each calling who were both good men and true, and their nerve and influence upon the more reckless spirits alone kept the settlement from being a perfect Hades upon earth.

To this place had one day come a youth of tender years, arriving by coach from Santa Fe, and bringing with him

a record as a deadly marksman and possessed of iron nerve in spite of the fact that he was yet under sixteen.

He had not blown his own trumpet, for he was a quiet little fellow, modest, yet full of fun and mischief, and a handsome boy, with a well-knit, agile and enduring frame, added to which was grit enough for a giant to possess.

He claimed to be a gold hunter, said he was on the trail of his fortune, came from nowhere and was going nowhere, while, as to his name, he had none, and people could call him what they pleased.

He had his worldly goods in a pack on his back, with a couple of Navaho blankets, a rubber blanket and coat, stout boots, slouch hat, a serviceable suit of clothes, a rifle and belt of arms.

A lariat also hung about his shoulders, with a haversack of provisions and several cooking utensils, giving him a heavy load to carry, but he explained that his pony had been shot, and Taos Tip, the stage driver, had given him an introduction into San Gabriel by saying that he had overtaken the boy trudging along the trail, had picked him up, and put him inside to rest and sleep, as he seemed very tired, and being held up by road agents an hour after, was startled by several shots from behind, and saw the leader of the outlaws and one of his men bite the dust.

He had forgotten the boy's existence, but the shots were from his revolver, and the outlaws were so surprised and startled that they sought cover, and, by lashing his team into a run, he had escaped them.

"Pards, I jist called him Little Sure Shot, and yer can't pick me up another like him anywhere," said Taos Tip.

And this opinion of Taos Tip gained ground rapidly, for "Little Sure Shot" made himself at home in the settlement, had money to pay for what he got, stopped at the San Gabriel Inn, bought him a pony, hunted gold six days in the week, and rested on Sunday.

He was courteous to all, and so gentle in his manner that many called him "Little Gentleman."

But who he was or what he had been not a soul knew, and he could keep his own counsel as to his past.

But Little Sure Shot had his enemies, though doing nothing to make them, and one band of reckless fellows, who had as their leader a Mexican who was known as Balboa the Bravo, made a plot one night to get rid of the boy.

He had beaten Balboa the Bravo at cards, was accused of cheating, and but for Diablo Dick, a desperado, and the most feared of all men in the settlement, he would have been killed, for though Little Sure Shot had dropped two of the gang with his unerring aim, Balboa was rushing upon him with his knife when he fell dead, and all heard the remark:

"I don't stand no game like that ag'in' ther boy."

"Does ther rest o' you fellers call it quits, or does yer want ter face Diablo Dick?"

The four remaining members of Balboa the Bravo's gang were anxious to call it "quits," and Diablo Dick, whatever his crimes were, was Little Sure Shot's friend for life.

And so the time passed on, with the boy getting into trouble now and then, but always coming out of it a hero, until one day the rumor came that Diablo Dick had gone on a hunt into a country full of game, and whither a band of Comanches had followed him.

The minute after hearing the news, Little Sure Shot had started to the rescue of the desperado, and so it was that

the bets had been made as to his coming back or not, and which Fred Foster had so promptly taken.

CHAPTER V.

TROUBLE IN THE "WIN AND LOSE."

I will now return to the scene before the bar of the Win and Lose Saloon, having made my reader acquainted with some of the more important characters of my story.

At the invitation of the Stranger Sport to those present to have a drink at his expense, it will be recalled that half a hundred had eagerly accepted, and among them four men who were known as the former pards of Balboa, the Mexican Bravo, whom Diablo Dick had killed to prevent him from knifing Little Sure Shot, the Highflyer.

They had a claim somewhere in the mountains which they pretended to work, but more generally passed their time in idleness about the saloons, gambling and drinking as the humor pleased them.

They had, since the death of their leader, kept very close together, and had not been as much in evidence in difficulties as they had before their number of seven had been cut down by three through the deadly aim of Little Sure Shot and Diablo Dick.

They had made no sign at Fred Foster's allusion to them as cowardly, in speaking of Little Sure Shot having been attacked by them, and tried to look innocent of being guilty, even going so far as to ignore the words cast into their teeth of cowardice, and crowding up to drink with the man who had uttered the denunciation.

But the eyes of Fred Foster had taken them in, and he was apparently surprised at their so boldly stepping up to accept his invitation.

When the silence was becoming oppressive to all, he spoke:

"Gentlemen, I asked you to join me in a drink, but I did not expect four who are present to accept my invitation, and I am surprised that they have done so after hearing me denounce them awhile since as having, with three others, made a most cowardly attack on the boy Little Sure Shot."

The words were calmly uttered, and the only show of feeling felt by Fred Foster shone from his burning eyes.

"Does yer mean that yer won't pay fer our drinks?" at last blurted out one of the four, when they saw every eye upon them, and knew that they were expected to speak.

"I did not say that; for I am not mean."

"I will pay for your drinks, yes, but that does not change my opinion of your being cowardly, as your conduct showed you to be."

"You calls us cowards, does yer?" cried another of the four.

"Come, do not detain these gentlemen, but take your drinks."

"I will then be ready to answer any questions, and stand responsible for my words."

A cheer greeted these words, and the bottles pushed down the line and came to the four men.

With the nerve of men who would do anything, they each one filled his glass, all eyes being upon them, except Fred Foster's, for he did not appear to be watching them.

"Here's to yer, Foster," said one, and the four raised their glasses and drained them.

Fred Foster's glass was raised to his lips, but the contents were not touched; they never were, and he said courteously to the crowd in general:

"My regards, gentlemen."

The men dashed off their liquor, and putting a large bill upon the bar, Fred Foster turned as though to get the change from Tom Totten, his back being toward the four men.

But his eyes were upon them, by aid of a looking glass, before which he had purposely taken his stand, and he saw the quickly whispered council among the men, and then one of them turned to face him, the other three falling back out of range.

Quick came his action, and when he turned his revolver was leveled, while the man yet had his weapon half drawn.

Then came the flash and report, followed by the words:

"Now, hands up, the three of you!"

He had not waited the half of a second to note the result of his shot, before he had the still smoking weapon covering the other three, who were fairly caught with their hands upon the hilts of their revolvers, yet not daring to draw them in that crowd as four men against one.

The etiquette of San Gabriel would not stand that, and they knew it; for when their band had attacked Little Sure Shot, they had made that fatal discovery.

The three men knew, too, that did they injure Fred Foster, and even kill him, they would have the crowd to fight, and so they did only what they could do, obeyed his command to raise their hands above their heads.

"If you are not able to bury your pard, send the bill to me, and let me advise that you keep clear of me in future, for I can tolerate a bad man, but not a coward."

"Gentlemen, good evening;" and the Stranger Sport left the Win and Lose Cabin with the cheers of the crowd ringing in his ears, and admiring remarks as to his unerring aim, for his bullet had struck his man squarely in the centre of his forehead.

CHAPTER VI.

A VERY CLOSE CALL.

Several days before the scene that opens this story, a man was walking along a pretty valley that lay between two mountain ranges, while his horse, a fine iron gray, was following untied a few paces behind him.

That the man had every confidence in his horse was proven by his rifle being slung to his saddle horn, a lariat hanging on the opposite side, with blankets, cooking utensils, and a bag of provisions all strapped securely to the cantle.

Should his horse dash away, the man would be left without food, blankets, or rifle.

Possessing a fine athletic arm, broad shoulders, and racy carriage, the man was dressed in a costume that was a combination of frontier and Mexican.

His face was darkly bronzed, his hair and beard were worn long, yet well cared for, and there was an air of neatness and certain refinement about him that was marked.

His boots were of the best make, his sombrero had cost a round sum, and his weapons, saddle, trappings, and general outfit were of an expensive kind.

As he walked along the valley his eyes were not upon the trail, but upon the ranges half a mile distant, upon either side, and turned, first to the right, then to the left, alternately, as though he was watching for something, or some one.

A herd of antelopes sped by within easy range, but were not noticed, and a flock of wild turkeys crossed his trail without a shot being fired at them, the

man still walking along, his eyes searching the ranges.

At last he came to where the valley ended in the foothills, and here halted as though undecided as to what to do.

"This is surely the valley, from all that I can glean from the description, and none other in these mountains, and I have seen them all, appears to be just like this one."

"I shall camp here to-night, and then to-morrow go down close to the range on one side, and upon the other, for I must find it."

"I would liked much to have killed one of those antelopes and turkeys, but I dared not give a shot here, as there are too many Indian signs around, and this is their hunting ground."

"No; I must take a cold supper and be satisfied."

"There is a little stream, with good grass near, and a thicket for cover."

So saying, the man walked the distance of a quarter of a mile, to where there was a good camping ground, and by sunset had staked his house out, spread his blankets, eaten his cold supper, and was ready to turn in for the night.

This he did, after smoking his pipe, and had slept for several hours when he was awakened by a sound from his horse.

Instantly he was up, and taking up the stake pin, he led his horse into the shelter of the thicket where he had been sleeping.

Hardly had he gained shelter, when he saw by the starlight a long line of shadowy-looking horsemen come into view.

He stood with one hand upon the nose of his horse, to prevent any sound, and the other grasping his rifle, while his eyes were riveted upon the horsemen, coming toward him at a slow walk.

The trail they were following was the one that led up the valley, and it passed the thicket that concealed him, not sixty feet from where he stood.

As the horsemen drew near, he saw that they were Indians, were fifty in number, and they were evidently in search of a camping place, or going to one they knew of.

Like spectres they passed by the man and horse, that stood as still as statues, and a sigh of relief came from the lone camper as he saw the last Indian horseman fading away from his view.

But just as he was flattering himself that they had gone, he saw that they did not disappear.

Instead, they had come to a halt, voices were heard, and he knew that they had come to stay, that they had found a camping place for the rest of the night.

This was a startling discovery, for they were not over a hundred yards from him.

He could not stay there, for the dawn would reveal him.

To leave he must go down the valley, and, in doing this, he would have to pass in view of the Indians, should they be keeping a watch.

To his surprise, they did not build fires, and this told him, from his knowledge of the Indian character, that they did not wish their presence known any more than he did.

Silently he bridled and saddled his horse, rolled up his blankets, and then led the animal out of the thicket, down the trail the redskins had come.

It was a moment of intense suspense, as he knew he was within view if they were watching; but he was not discovered, and as he mounted his horse when out of sight, he muttered to himself:

"That was a very close call for you, Diablo Dick."

CHAPTER VII.
A RESCUER.

Having ridden several miles down the valley, Diablo Dick, the Desperado of San Gabriel, as his words had betrayed him to be, decided to again go into camp and rest out the balance of the night.

The pebbly stream that ran down the valley here and there had near it a thicket of pines, or cedars, and seeking shelter in one of these he was soon asleep once more, while his horse fed upon the grass he could find within the length of his stake rope.

When dawn began to break, the man was awake, and he carefully peered from his retreat up and down the valley.

He could not see the Indians, but knew about where they had camped, and mused aloud:

"They saw my trail coming to the valley, and were tracking me beyond a doubt.

"I have nothing to do but to return to San Gabriel and come here on my search when it is not the hunting season, for I shall not give up my search, as I feel sure that at last I have struck the right valley.

"Now I'll have breakfast, and then push ahead, and a long race it will be if they see me.

"But I was lucky not to have lighted a fire last night, for it would have ended my career beyond all doubt, and I have got much to live for yet, I have."

Another cold snack served for breakfast, and then his horse was saddled and bridled, and the start made, the man walking, and leaving the animal to follow as he often did, to relieve him of his weight.

As he walked he kept his eye upon the mountains upon either side, as he had done the day before.

Thus passed a couple of hours, and a glance behind him showed that the Indians had not discovered him, or at least were not in pursuit.

"If I get through the pass at the end of the valley I will be all right, for it's open land beyond," he muttered, and he fixed his gaze upon the pass as he neared it, to suddenly halt, glance quickly about him, and then leap into his saddle and dash toward a little hill, the summit of which was rocky and sheltered by a dozen or more cedars.

His sudden action had been caused by suddenly hearing a shot in the distance beyond the pass, and seeing an Indian fall from a rock to the trail, fifty feet below.

The same shot caused several other Indians to reveal themselves, as they hastily sprang from their hiding places in the pass and ran for shelter.

"Well, whoever fired that shot saved my life, for I was riding straight into the ambush prepared for me in the pass.

"He killed his redskin, too, and made them show their hands, for I counted eight of them.

"They were doubtless left there yesterday by the band I saw last night, and were lying in wait for me.

"Ah! They are coming to interview me, I see, at least five of them are, leaving three to watch for that unknown foe, and I do hope they won't get him, for I owe him my life.

"I'll just give him a warning of what is going on here, by a shot or two."

Diablo Dick had placed his horse in a secure position behind a boulder, close at hand, while he had taken shelter also, but so as to command the approach to the hill upon all sides.

The five Indians who had left the pass were now mounted, and widely scattered, they were charging the hill, concealing

themselves as much as possible behind the bodies of their ponies.

As they came within range, Diablo Dick picked his man and his rifle cracked.

The redskin at whom he aimed fell dead from his horse, and the others wheeled about to get out of range.

As they did so there came another crack of a rifle from the pass, and another Indian fell, while two others ran to their ponies, mounted and rode to join their comrades.

Then the party gathered together in council, and could be seen talking and gesticulating excitedly.

"Well, they have gotten a setback, for my unknown friend killed their chief with his first shot, and his second has forced them to leave the pass, and I have one to my credit.

"But the unknown seem to have a position on the cliff above the pass, and he certainly holds the fort.

"I only wish that I was with him.

"Ah! Their pow-wow is over, and they are determined to rush upon me.

"Let them come, for I can but do my best," and Diablo Dick stood ready to fight to the bitter end.

Again his rifle cracked and a pony went down, but the others still came on, until a loud shout came from behind them, a shot at long range followed, another pony fell, and there dashed into view a horse and rider, while Diablo Dick cried:

"By the Gods of War! It's Little Sure Shot, the Boy Highflyer!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BOY HIGHFLYER EXPLAINS.

The sudden charge of the youth through the pass, coming to the rescue of Diablo Dick, was at once taken advantage of by the man, who threw a load into his rifle, leaped upon his horse, and dashed down the hill to meet the boy.

The Indians, fortunately for Diablo Dick and the rescuer, had not charged between the grass and the man they sought to capture or kill, but around to one side, and this gave him an open field in making his escape.

It was their mistake and they realized it, for it at once put them behind their foes and the pass open to them for escape.

There were yet five Indians, however, though two of them were dismounted, but the ponies of their slain comrades were not far away, so they would all soon be mounted and in pursuit.

They were all armed with rifles, too, and, when they had sent a volley of bullets after the escaping white man, those who were mounted sought to catch the loose ponies for their dismounted comrades.

The shots of the five redskins flew dangerously near to Diablo Dick, but not one touched him, and he did not return the fire, at long range as would have been his shot, and riding rapidly, too.

He simply pressed on in a run to meet his young rescuer, who had halted, when he saw that he would escape in safety.

As he sat there upon his horse, waiting for the man's appearance, the youth presented the beau ideal of the Boy Plainsman.

His years could not have been over sixteen, and he was small for his age, yet perfectly formed, and was dressed in a rakish sort of costume that showed that he was careful of his personal appearance.

His dark chestnut looked like a clean-limbed racer, and was well equipped.

The youth was armed with a rifle, and a pair of revolvers and long knife were in his belt.

His dark hair was worn short, and clustered about his temples in a very attractive way, giving him a more boyish look than would otherwise have been the case.

His face, neck, and hands were burned a very dark brown by long exposure to an outdoor life, and his features were well cast, handsome, and full of expression.

In his eyes there seemed to rest, even at that time of danger, a constant smile, half of mischief, half of recklessness.

But they were honest eyes, as bright as diamonds, and seemed to look one through and through.

"Well, Diablo Dick, I got here in time, and I'm mighty glad of it," shouted the youth as the man who was called a desperado in San Gabriel came dashing up to where he was awaiting his approach.

"Yer got here in time, young feller, to save my life, but what in thunder is yer doin' here," answered Diablo Dick, speaking now in a drawling tone, and with a strong dialect.

"I came simply to return the service you did me once, and save you from the Comanches."

"Give me yer hand, Highflyer, fer yer did what yer came fer; but who told yer I needed yer?"

"I heard a cowboy from the El Dorado Ranch say you had come this way on a hunt, and that he had seen a big band of Indians following your trail, from where he was lying in hiding, watching them with a glass.

"So I thought you needed help, and here I am."

"You bet yer is, and with both feet.

"But did yer kill that Injun who were on ther cliff?"

"Yes; I saw them yesterday evening, a number of them, and watched them go up the valley at sunset, all but a few who stayed to guard the pass.

"I knew then that you had not been captured, and I tried to get into the valley over the range, but could not, and so went into camp for the night.

"This morning I was trying again to get over the range, and was giving it up when I saw you coming down the valley.

"I knew you would ride into the trap at the pass, so I got a position, picked off the sentinel, and you know the rest.

"Now, we had better be moving out of this, for look up the valley, and you'll make a discovery."

The man glanced up the valley and cried:

"The whole band, and not a mile away!

"But, Highflyer, yer is a dandy, and I'm yours ter command fer life.

"Put it thar, Boy Pard, and let me thank yer agin and agin."

"I don't want thanks, and have no time to listen just now, for there come those five redskins now, and they are mad clean through, and determined to catch us before their comrades come up.

"We've got to ride for it, Diablo Dick, if we wish to save our scalps."

"You bet we has, and I'm with yer—my! but them five Injuns is well mounted an' no mistake," cried Diablo Dick, and the two started off side by side in rapid flight, their pursuers following them rapidly, evidently anxious to redeem themselves, for having allowed the palefaces to escape them.

CHAPTER IX.

ODDS AGAINST THEM.

Little Sure Shot and Diablo Dick were well mounted, but the pony of the youth had been driven hard by his young rider in crossing from San Gabriel to the rescue of the man whom all others appeared

to think it would be a good riddance if the Comanches did capture or kill him.

It had even been whispered by some of his worst foes, yet never so that he could hear it, that Diablo Dick was an ally of the Comanches, a renegade to his own race; but of this at least Little Sure Shot had found him innocent, for he had found the Indians hot on his trail, and certainly if their ally they would not be attacking him.

"I guess, after all, he's not so bad as they paint him," said Little Sure Shot, when he saw this.

"Why, they make me out a thorough young devil, and yet I don't think I am."

Having rescued Diablo Dick as he had done, and the two in flight, it was then a case of a long chase, with the odds greatly in favor of the Indians as to numbers, for the large band was pressing on as rapidly as they could ride.

The odds seemed to favor the Indians, too, through their horses being fresh, while the young Highflyer's pony was about used up.

"We can push on fast, Highflyer, until your horse fails, and then mine must do double work."

"Yes, or we must find a place where we can stand them off, and leave a good record to show that we died game, Diablo Dick," was the reckless reply of the youth.

"You bet we do, only I hain't stuck on dyin' a little bit jist yit."

"I hain't been useful enough in life, don't yer see, ter wish ter cash in my chips jist yit awhile."

The youth laughed, in his gay and reckless way and said:

"When death comes, it will find me ready to meet it, Diablo Dick, and I won't play the baby act, either."

"Well, yer is a dandy, an' no mistake, young feller."

"They don't make many like you."

"Oh, yes, they do; only you have not met them; but those reds are creeping upon us."

"They is, fer a fact."

They had passed through the gap that formed the entrance to the valley, and where Diablo Dick had so nearly lost his life by riding into an ambush, and they were speeding along over a broad and barren plain toward where the horizon was broken by a cedar thicket upon a slight ridge.

"If my pony holds out to get there, we can fight them while he gets a rest, and can push on again," said Little Sure Shot.

"That's just what we kin do; but will he last that far; it's a good four miles."

"I think he will," came the confident response. On they sped, with the first batch of redskins a third of a mile behind them, and the large band over a mile behind the five leaders.

The young Highflyer's pony showed each moment that his strength was giving out, but still he seemed able to reach the ridge, if the Indians in advance did not overtake the fugitives before they could get there.

Nearer and nearer drew the ridge, but nearer and nearer came the five warriors, urging their ponies to the utmost, while those behind were creeping up, too, though still a mile in the rear.

"If my horse was only fresh we could distance those fellows very quickly," said the Highflyer in a most matter-of-fact manner, as though it was an ordinary race.

"Yes; for he's a goer when he's rested, and mine could make two miles to their one."

"I know he could, and if it comes to the worst, I wish you to skip ahead."

"And leave you?"

"Why not, when it would only be two lives instead of one, and I'm no use on earth more than to enjoy life as it comes to me."

"Now, look yer, kid; I may be all that's bad, and more, but yer don't know Diablo Dick if yer thinks he'd desert even his enemy in time o' need."

"I did not believe you would, only I wish you to escape, if it comes to where I must go under, for it's dead sure you, too, will go under if you remain with me."

"You could avenge me, you know, and then I'd rest easy in my grave, if I was given one," said the youth in his reckless way.

"See here, leetle pard; I've got something to say ter yer."

"Fire away, Diablo!"

"We are going to reach that ridge, and there we will make a stand."

"If you get kilt, I'll skip durned quick on my horse, and if I go under you do ther same."

"Sure."

"And if it's me that dies, I wants ter tell yer ter take my belt off, a buckskin belt I wears, and what it tells yer ter do, jest do; and more—it's all yer own."

"Ther belt holds that as will explain, so I need say no more 'bout that."

"Now, push that critter all yer can, fer them Injuns is gainin' onter us."

CHAPTER X.

WHO HE WAS.

The cedar ridge was not far away, but the ground was growing rougher and more impassable, and here and there was seamed with great gullies.

The young rider's tired-out horse stumbled badly at times, and his pace grew slower and more labored.

Still, it looked as though he could hold out to the ridge, when the two comrades would find a good place to make a stand and fight the Indians off. Even when the whole force came up they might be held at bay until the horses had obtained an absolutely necessary rest.

But, the five Indians keeping close together, were driving their ponies hard, straining every nerve to get to the pale-faces and capture or kill them before their comrades, half a hundred strong, should come up.

By doing so they would wipe out their defeat in the valley and avenge their chief, whom the boy had killed, and the braves slain as well.

To accomplish their purpose they would risk life a dozen times over.

At last, as it appeared to the pursuers that their two foes must reach the ridge, the five of them came to a quick halt, their rifles were fired together, and down fell the tired horse of the young Highflyer, rolling over his rider, who had not been able to free himself from his saddle, quick as he was in the effort to do so.

Diablo Dick perceived the horse was mortally wounded, and the actions of the youth showed him that the rider was half dazed by his fall, perhaps also hit by a bullet. Instantly he wheeled his horse and raised his rifle to check the advance of the Indians. A quick shot and the bullet tumbled a brave from his saddle. Then coolly, but with great rapidity, Diablo threw another shot into his gun and glanced at the youth before he fired.

What he saw fairly startled, yet delighted him.

What he beheld was a horseman riding like the wind toward the youth, who was on the ground near his horse, and striving to rise to his feet, yet unable to do so.

The horseman had risen as though by magic from the earth beneath him, and was then within a few rods of the youth.

Round the youth the strange rider circled, and without checking the speed of his horse, he swooped low from his saddle, and with his left hand grasped the youth's belt, raised him in midair and went flying along with him thus suspended toward the cedar-fringed ridge.

Diablo Dick uttered a wild yell of triumph as he witnessed this daring feat of the stranger; and then again his finger drew on the trigger of his good rifle.

With the report a second of the little band in advance tumbled from his saddle, and seeing that Diablo Dick still stood at bay, his revolvers in hand now, as they could not, while riding rapidly, reload their weapons, the three remaining Indians circled quickly around and stopped the pursuit to await the arrival of their comrades, two-thirds of a mile behind them.

Seeing that the young Highflyer was safe, the immediate pursuit checked, and that the horseman who had come to their rescue was near the ridge, Diablo Dick, with a war cry of defiance, turned and rode on, skilfully reloading his rifle as he did so, and noting that the three braves were then also reloading their weapons.

When Diablo Dick reached the ridge the horseman had dismounted and had given the youth something from a flask to revive him, while he was bathing his face with water from his canteen.

"I believe I am all right, now, Dick," said the youth, rubbing his eyes.

"I was stunned, but I felt you grab me, and I seemed to be flying; but, where are the reds—ah! You are not Diablo Dick!" and for the first time, the youth looked upon his rescuer.

"No; your friend is there, all safe, yet. You must mount my horse, for he is fresh, and move on, while I stand those redskins off, then I will follow."

The stranger spoke in a quick, confident way, with the air of one who was accustomed to giving commands and expecting them to be obeyed.

He was a splendid specimen of manhood—tall, straight, superbly formed, dressed in a picturesque border garb, and with his brown hair falling upon his shoulders.

His face was most striking in its features and expression, and he looked the man to do and dare any deed that required nerve.

Diablo Dick had halted, as he drew near, and as he looked upon the stranger he mused:

"It is Buffalo Bill, the great scout! and he has orders to take me dead or alive; but, as I now am playing the role of Diablo Dick, he does not know me, so all will be well, I guess."

CHAPTER XI.

SURPRISED REDSKINS.

"Well, pard, yer saved ther kid in great shape, and got me out of a mighty tight scrape," spoke Diablo, as he approached Buffalo Bill, and extended his hand.

The Chief of Scouts took it and replied: "I saw you two coming a long way off, so rode into one of the gullies to give the Indians a surprise, but had to show myself when the youth's horse was shot."

"Now, mount my horse, both of you, for he is fresh and can carry you two easily. I will follow on your horse when I have made those Comanches believe we are going to make a stand here."

"It is just what should be done, pard, 'ceptin' I'm ther one ter stay behind," answered Dick.

"No; you go with the boy, and get a long start; then we will have nothing to fear from pursuit."

"See, I have a repeating rifle, one that fires seventeen shots, and it will make those reds cautious about following after they have heard its music and felt its sting."

Diablo gazed upon the repeating rifle, at that time a new weapon, with great interest and admiration, and seeing that the scout meant to be obeyed, he prepared to mount with the youth, only suggesting that they ride his own horse instead of that of the rescuer.

"No, take mine," ordered the scout; "you can make better time, and he will not feel the double weight."

So the Highflyer was aided into the handsome saddle of the scout, not yet wholly himself. Diablo sprang up behind him, and the splendid black horse was started off across the plain which stretched for miles beyond the ridge.

Buffalo Bill—for it was in truth the great scout—fastened the animal of Diablo Dick where the shots of the Indians could not harm him, and turned to face his foes, for the large band was now about coming up to where the three braves awaited them.

At a long swinging lope the big black carried Diablo Dick and the youth across the plain, neither of them speaking a word until half a mile had been passed.

Then Diablo Dick spoke: "This horse could keep this gait up all the way to San Gabriel."

"He's a splendid animal," returned Sure Shot.

"Ther' best I ever see."

"But, wasn't it fortunate for me that his rider was near?"

"Yes, and fer me, fer I would hev' stood thar by yer, boy pard, to ther end."

"I know that, Dick, good friend. You are not half the devil they try to make you out. That I know."

"Thanks, kid! Kind words allus helps a bad man."

"But who is that splendid-looking fellow, Diablo, who seems to be all fixed up for a masquerade ball? I never saw a more noble-looking man, and he's worthy of his good looks."

"You bet he is, leetle pard; and he deserves all they says of him."

"You know him, then?"

"I know who he is."

"He did not seem to recognize you, Diablo."

"I'm durned glad he didn't, fer I don't want him ter know me."

"Why not?"

"I have my reasons, kid, so don't ax more on that score."

"Well, who is he?"

"Ther' biggest all-round man on ther frontier, from ther Gulf to ther Big Horn Basin, and that's saying a great deal—jist hark at that?"

"Great Heavens! what a gun—listen, oh, listen, kid, to that wonderful music! Gods, what a gun! What a man!"

In his excitement Diablo Dick had reached around the youth, and grasping the reins, had brought the black to a halt, turning him so that they could look back at the ridge.

What had so excited the usually calm borderman was the hearing of the scout's matchless rifle, as it was fired with evident deliberate aim, and yet rapidly.

Shot after shot rang out, until seventeen had echoed, and there stood the scout, upright, half shielded behind a large rock, while he sent death into the midst of the charging Indians, who, after a short council, had decided to charge upon the ridge, believing the youth was badly wounded and that they only had two whites to fight.

But the fusillade that ensued surprised them; then it amazed them, as they

continued on their headlong charge. Next they were staggered, for both braves and ponies were hit hard, and, unable to face that scathing fire, they wheeled and rode in reverse at full speed, believing they were facing a dozen or more men, who must have been lying in ambush behind the ridge.

Back they went, determined to accomplish by cunning and strategy what they could not do by force, and slowly they began to surround the position on the ridge occupied, as they believed, by a dozen or more of their white foes.

But, when they did surround the ridge, to their utter amazement no foe was there!

CHAPTER XII.

THE SCOUT'S RUSE.

When the rapid rattle of the scout's repeating rifle ceased, Diablo Dick said quickly:

"He will come now, for he checked 'em, you bet."

"Ride on, kid, so we kin git a good start."

The youth obeyed, and the black went on at a swifter pace than before.

Looking back, Diablo Dick saw that Buffalo Bill had left the ridge and was running toward where he had left the horse, to mount and follow.

"Well, that rifle jist knocks me clean out, and I'll bet he sent some of them bullets home to heart and brain."

"Why, them Injins jist thinks thet thar is all of a dozen or more pale-faces on thet ridge a fightin' 'em, fer ther scout are too knowin' a man to let 'em see him, and thet one man were doin' all ther shootin'."

"See, he's a comin', and ther reds will now try a sly game ter git at ther foes and find him gone."

"You seem to know redskin ways mighty well, Diablo Dick."

"I oughter, fer I has seen much of 'em, and you hain't backward in what you know of 'em nuther."

"Nor should I be, for I have lived among them," was the reply of the young Highflyer.

Diablo Dick looked fixedly at the youth and was about to speak; but before he could do so the boy said:

"But you did not tell me who that splendid-looking man is."

"Did yer ever hear tell of Buffalo Bill?"

"Yes indeed, the great scout, Indian fighter and guide."

"Thet's him."

"The man who saved me?"

"Thet man who saved us."

"Is Buffalo Bill?"

"Yes."

"Well, it must be, from all I have heard of him. But isn't he grand?"

"He's all thet yer kin say in his favor, kid. Yer see, he belongs in ther army up in the Northwest, and what he's doing down here in New Mexico I don't jist know, but you kin jist bet he's not here ter idle his time away."

"Why, I have heard the most marvelous stories told of his daring deeds, wonderful escapes and kind acts."

"All kin be true of thet man, as I happen to know."

"Why did you not call him by name or recognize him?"

"Pard Sure Shot!"

"Yes."

"I didn't want ter."

"Ah!"

"I tell you frankly that I don't want him ter know me, or know that I have seen him before."

"I jist am plain Diablo Dick, a half Mexican, half Texan, and bad man from

San Gabriel; but I am his friend, all ther same, as he'll find out if thar is reason fer it, though he haint mine, as you'll see, if he tumbles to who I really am. Does yer savey?"

"I do."

"Then jist keep ther trail accordin', and don't give me away fer other than they knows me in San Gabriel."

"You can trust me, Diablo Dick."

"You bet I does trust yer, boy pard. But see, yonder he comes at a swift lope, and ther Injins haint yit discovered thet ther foe hev' levanted."

"Just wait until they do, and we'll hear them sing," laughed the boy.

"We will fer a fact. Why, they'll split ther throats cursin' in Comanche."

"But your horse comes on fresh with the scout, after his rest."

"Oh, yes, we have nothing to fear now, for this black can outrun their best ponies with both of us backin' him, and my horse won't be far behind."

"Then ther Comanches won't foller us many miles further, and we ought ter reach San Gabriel by night and not ride over fast."

"Oh, yes, we will; but I wonder if the scout is going there?"

"Don't know; but we'll find out when he comes up."

"See yonder."

"The Indians are on the ridge!" cried the Highflyer, as he looked back.

"Yes, they has divided ther force, and is flankin' ther position ther scout held—hark! They sees thet ther was only one man and he is a mile away."

"Why, jist listen to 'em howl even at this distance."

"Yes, the dead can hear them; but I'll be glad of a little rest, when we can take it, for I was considerably shaken up by my horse rolling over me."

"Yes, and haint one ter whimper."

"But we'll halt when we can, and ther scout is catchin' up fast, so will soon be here," answered Diablo Dick, who saw that his young companion was pale and suffering.

CHAPTER XIII.

BUFFALO BILL CHECKS PURSUIT.

About two miles from the ridge, while the scout's black was loping easily along with his double load, the good horse of Diablo Dick, urged to a swifter pace, came up, Buffalo Bill, calm and apparently unmoved by his fight with the redskins and his clever ruse in thus leaving them to discover his flight as best they could.

"Well, pards, we have eluded them, and there is no danger of their overtaking us now," he said pleasantly.

"No, sir, we is all right; but what did yer say yer name might be, pard?" asked Diablo Dick.

"My name is William F. Cody, but I am better known by that of Buffalo Bill, and I am an army scout."

"Oh! you is ther scout Buffalo Bill," cried Diablo Dick, with well-feigned surprise, as the two horses loped along side by side.

"I am, and I would like to be on even terms with my new-found friends, as far as knowing their names."

"Sure, and yer shall. As fer me, I'm nobody, but is called Diablo Dick in San Gabriel, and men says I is a all-round bad man, and maybe I is."

"This young gamecock we calls Little Sure Shot, the Boy Highflyer, and he's a dandy from wayback, as yer will know when I tells yer thet because I wouldn't see him imposed upon onct, he heard I was in danger o' being corralled by Comanches, having come up here on a hunt,

and he lit out alone ter come ter my rescue, and did save me jist half an hour afore you did as much fer us again.

"Now yer knows us, sir, and I tell yer it are our honor and delight ter know Buffalo Bill, whose record we have down fine."

"You flatter me, for I am no more than hundreds of men in this wild land."

"But you appear to be suffering, my young friend."

"The fall I got shook me up, sir; but I don't think any bones are broken, though I feel as though I'd been kicked out of camp."

Buffalo Bill smiled at the simile of the boy, and replied:

"We will camp as soon as we find those Comanches give up the chase, and then we'll see how much you are hurt."

"But aren't you rather young to be out in this country?"

"I'm not old, sir; but I manage to get along."

"You bet he does, and he deserves ther name they give him in San Gabriel of ther young Highflyer, fer he kin take keer o' himself among 'em all."

"But ther Injins is going to give us a chase."

"Yes, it comes hard for them to give us up. I'll halt behind these rocks there, and give them another surprise, while you continue on, and I guess then they'll let us alone" said Buffalo Bill.

To give an idea that they were all in rapid flight, Buffalo Bill rode ahead of the black, thus presenting a single file view to the Indians.

As they approached the rocks he suddenly slipped off of his horse and let him halt where he would be concealed from the view of the pursuers.

The black, with Diablo Dick and Little Sure Shot, swept on.

"They won't foller us no further than those rocks," said Diablo Dick.

"No, not after they strike a snag again. Well, I'll be willing, for I'm about used up," was the Highflyer's response.

As they rode on, Diablo Dick kept his face turned and his eyes watching the Indians and the concealed scout.

On came the Indians, not once noticing that one of the horses had slipped out; that they were not still running in Indian file, and a deadly foe lay in wait for them.

Suddenly Diablo Dick called out:

"Now they'll catch it, boy pard!"

"Hark! Jist listen ter thet rifle!"

"Oh! don't it make sweet music, and the shots tell—no, as I live, the scout is shooting the ponies, not the braves."

"Can it not be that he misses the braves?"

"No, Sure Shot, that man don't miss nothin' he aims ter kill—he's shootin' ther ponies."

"And why?"

"'Cause he's merciful. He's got a big heart in him, like every brave man should hev, and he won't take human life, if it is Injins, when he kin stop ther chase by shootin' ther ponies."

"Yes, it must be as you say, for he has not killed a brave this time," said Sure Shot.

"No, and he's coming on now at a run, fer ther Injins has halted, and you bet they won't face thet rifle no more on this hunt."

And on kept the black, little feeling the weight he carried, while the horse of Diablo Dick brought Buffalo Bill rapidly on until he came up with the mand called out:

"They will not pursue us any further, and we will soon find a camping-place and look to your hurts, boy pard."

CHAPTER XIV.

TO BE A SECRET.

After going a couple of miles further on their way, they came to a small stream with a fringe of timber upon it, and here a halt was made.

They could see the Indians, should they follow, for all of half a mile distant, so would have time to saddle up and move on.

But the redskins, if they had intended to follow, had shown no indication of doing so.

The two horses were first looked to, bridles and saddles being taken off, after which they were staked out to feed, for grass was plentiful.

Then Buffalo Bill turned his attention to Little Sure Shot, while Diablo Dick set to work to cook breakfast.

With a skill born of experience in just such work, Buffalo Bill placed the youth flat on a blanket and began to examine him from head to foot for broken bones.

To his joy he found none, and that the boy suffered only from his severe fall and bruises.

These were bathed in arnica, and as breakfast was ready the three ate with a relish, the youth stating that his appetite had not been affected by his injuries.

Lighting his pipe, Buffalo Bill set out on foot to a rise a quarter of a mile away to reconnoitre.

The two pards were watching him closely, and saw that he crept up the rise, and did not reveal himself to any Indians that might be in view from his position.

But the scout did not remain over a minute upon the rise, but started back at a run for the camp.

"He sees trouble ahead," cried Diablo Dick, and he instantly ran to saddle up the horses, while Little Sure Shot gathered the camp outfit and had all ready by the time the scout came up at a run.

"We are between three bands of redskins, counting those who pursued us."

"You and the boy must mount your horse, Diablo Dick, and follow down the bed of the stream, and you can escape them and be well on your way to San Gabriel."

"I will freshen up the fire, remain here, and let the redskins prepare to surround me, so it will take time and give you a good chance to escape."

"And leave you alone? That ain't our style," said Diablo Dick.

"I was alone when you found me; but I appreciate your good intention, pards."

"But you have but one horse between you, and he is not over fresh, and the boy is really suffering from his fall."

"You must do as I tell you."

"But you risk almost certain death by staying here, sir."

"No, my lad, for you see those two ravines yonder?"

"They are over a quarter of a mile apart, deep, and cannot be crossed by the Indians, who will not look for us to escape toward their country."

"I will ride right between them, and should they crowd me, my repeating rifle will have something to say."

"You bet it will. But don't do as yer done afore, and kill dumb brutes instead of human," said Diablo Dick.

"I hate, indeed, to kill a horse, but it must be his life if I can accomplish the same without shooting his rider."

"Now, are you ready?"

"We is, fer I 'spose we has ter mind yer."

"Yes. We do what you tell us, but under protest," Little Sure Shot said.

"It is the safe way for all of us, for I saw no less than four hundred mounted warriors."

"Go the way I tell you, and you will easily escape, and lose no time in hastening to San Gabriel and placing the whole settlement on guard against an attack by a large force of Indians. And one thing more."

"Yes, sir."

"Do not speak of having seen me, or of any part I have taken in your escape, for I shall expect this of you, yes, hold you to it."

"I'll do as you says, pard, fer I guesses you has yer reasons."

"As I will, sir; but I hate to have you not get the credit you deserve."

"Never mind me, boy pard, only do as I say, for it is a secret, my being here, I do not wish known."

"Now go, and luck to you."

"I will remain here and make the redskins believe we are all here in a trap, for they can't see my horse."

The youth and Diablo Dick grasped the hand of the scout in farewell, the former mounted in the saddle, the latter leaped up behind him, and the horse was ridden into the shallow stream and the start was made.

As they got half a mile down the stream Diablo Dick looked back and said:

"He's still there, and has built a big fire to fool ther reds."

"I only hopes he don't take too big chances, for his stayin' has saved our lives, Little Sure Shot."

"And I won't forget it, either."

"Nor me, too."

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT DIABLO DICK SAW.

Following along the stream the banks kept them from being seen, should any redskin be off a short distance on the plain, while here and there were fringes of timber that concealed them.

A mile was gone over, for the stream was shallow and the wading easy for the horse, while, finding that he could do so, Diablo Dick had relieved the animal of his weight and walked along the shore.

Thus another mile was passed, and the two pards felt that they had passed out between the Indian bands and were safe.

They had come, too, toward San Gabriel, and having reached a growth of heavy timber they left the stream and rode on rapidly toward a range a mile away.

Here a halt was made, and Diablo Dick climbed to the top of the ridge and had a view of the plain for miles around him.

He saw that the scout had not exaggerated the number of redskins, for he could see all of five hundred in sight. And they were stretched out in a vast circle, completely surrounding the clump of timber on the stream where had been their camp.

This spot he could readily pick out by the smoke curling up above the trees.

The nearest Indians to where they had halted were all of two miles away, and the circle was slowly narrowing toward the little camp.

The Comanches did not intend there should be any mistake, for they would all close in upon the timber where they believed their three paleface foes to be.

"Little Sure Shot!"

"Ay, ay, Dick."

"There's about half a thousand of 'em."

"And the scout?"

"Is in the timber where we left him."

"He can get out?"

"No, he can't, for contrary to his views, these reds has jist completely surrounded the camp and is closing in on it."

"My God! then he is doomed, Diablo Dick."

"It looks about that way."

"And we can do nothing."

"Yes, we can."

"What?"

"We kin jist push ther breeze fer San Gabriel and warn the settlement that ther Comanches is out fer scalps, and they won't be long behind us in gittin' thar, and that's ther reason they hes been so keerful ter take in thet camp whar they believes we all is."

"But where they will only find the scout."

"Yes."

"I feel ashamed for having left him there."

"As I does."

"What are they doing now, Dick?"

"Closing in on ther camp. They'll charge in a minute or two, and then I'll come down and we'll git in great style."

A moment after Diablo Dick called out:

"They is chargin'!"

"I can hear them."

"They has got inter ther timber, and jist hear ther shots cracking. It's all up now with ther scout," and as the firing and yelling ceased Diablo Dick hastily ran down the steep ridge, calling to Little Sure Shot to mount as he did so, for the boy had also dismounted to save the horse his weight while still.

Leaping up behind the youth, Diablo Dick cried:

"Now set him at a steady lope, boy pard, and he's got ter stick to it fer many a long mile, fer ther settlement must be warned, and our halting has delayed us fer an hour, and ther reds might push us hard."

The splendid horse was kept at a steady lope mile after mile, Diablo Dick leaping off in ascending and descending hills and when the trail was rough, thus relieving the animal of his weight, for it was now that it was beginning to tell.

As night was coming on Diablo Dick said:

"Highflyer!"

"Well?"

"Thar's but one thing ter be done, and you has got ter ride on alone, leavin' me ter foller on foot, fer ther horse can't stand double no longer, and I tell yer San Gabriel has got ter be warned."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HIGHFLYER'S WARNING.

"We deserted the scout, and now you expect me to desert you," was Little Sure Shot's indignant answer to the words of Diablo Dick, telling him to go on and warn San Gabriel.

"See here, Boy Pard, this hain't no time fer talk."

"Thar is ther settlement ter warn, an' many a man will die unless yer does as I says."

"It's a good long fifteen mile ter San Gabriel, and ther horse won't any more than git you thar, and in none too much time, for riders has ter go out and warn ther ranches and ther miners o' ther danger."

"I is good on foot, and I'll come along behind, and git there afore dawn."

"You go on, and let me walk."

"Why, yer kin hardly sit in ther saddle now, so don't talk foolish."

"I'll take yer gun and all extra traps, ter relieve ther horse of all weight, and then push him, if yer has ter break his noble heart."

Little Sure Shot saw that Diablo Dick was right, and he knew that he must go, and five minutes after was loping away on the trall, leaving the man to follow, and pretty well loaded down with what

he had made it his duty to carry to save the horse upon which so much depended.

"And they call that man a terror, a desperado, a tough."

"Why, he has a heart that is tender and noble, whatever they may say of him."

"I hate to leave him, and yet it is just what I must do to warn the settlement, for that large force of Indians here surely means nothing more than an attack on San Gabriel, and they'll strike at dawn, beyond a doubt."

"That scout's death worries me, for I can't get over it."

"Maybe, though, they took him alive, and so there is a chance for him to escape, for I have heard that his escapes from death have been wonderful."

"Come, old horse, the sun is setting, and you've got a dozen miles before you yet," and the young Highflyer kept his horse at a steady gallop, tired though he was, while, as he rode, he continued to muse about his having left Diablo Dick behind, and of the fate he feared had befallen Buffalo Bill.

At last the lights of San Gabriel came into view, and none too soon, for the noble horse was barely kept on his feet.

"Rally at the Win and Lose, pards, for the Comanches are coming in force," cried Little Sure Shot, as he passed the different cabins along the trail, and his words at once gave warning of danger and set the men to preparing for the threatened attack.

Just as he drew up at the door of the Win and Lose, the utterly worn out horse toppled forward, and the youth's agility barely saved him from another heavy fall.

As he entered the saloon a wild yell went up from the crowd, over a hundred in number, and Tom Totten shouted:

"The Highflyer's back, Foster, and you win the purse."

"Not yet, for where is Diablo Dick?" yelled a voice.

"Yes; ther game was thet they both was ter git back."

"That's it! Ther Highflyer were ter save Diablo Dick."

"Yes; no save, no money."

"Have it your own way, for I'll bet you the Highflyer saved Diablo Dick," came in the calm voice of Fred Foster, and a shout arose from those who were hoping for another chance to win, or at least save their money by the bet being declared off.

"Silence, all!"

"I have news for you."

The voice of the young Highflyer rang clear as a trumpet, and every eye was upon him as he called out:

"I wish to tell you all that half a thousand Comanches are riding on San Gabriel now, to attack at daylight, or all signs fail."

These words created a sensation at once, but the Stranger Sport commanded silence, and asked:

"Where are you just from, Highflyer?"

"I left the Blue Water Valley at dawn this morning, was corraled by redskins, but got away, and came on to give warning that five hundred mounted braves are on Red Bank Creek, just before noon today, and that means an attack on San Gabriel, if I see it right."

"It does, indeed."

"But did you ride from Blue Water River down?" asked Tom Totten.

"I did, and fear I have killed Diablo Dick's horse in doing so, for part of the way he carried double weight."

"Where is Diablo Dick?" was shouted in half a hundred voices.

"He's coming, all right," and the

Highflyer was astounded at the shouts his reply occasioned, for he knew nothing of the bets placed upon the life of the desperado and his own.

CHAPTER XVII.

READY FOR THE FOE.

The Highflyer gazed about him in astonishment at the wild cries of those who were glad that Fred Foster had won the purse, with the young miner pard whose game he had taken off of his hands.

As several days had passed, and nothing had been heard of either the young Highflyer or Diablo Dick, many began to feel certain that both had been killed by the redskins.

Where it was looked upon as a good thing for the community in the case of Diablo Dick, many regretted that the youth should meet such a fate.

As time went on, other bets were offered that both the Highflyer and Diablo Dick were dead, and whatever his motive for doing so, beyond a desire to gamble, Fred Foster took all bets promptly that the boy would return in safety, and bring the desperado with him or know what the fate of the latter had been.

Several bets had just been offered and taken when Little Sure Shot appeared in the Win and Lose Saloon.

He was very pale, his face was scratched and bruised, and he had a haggard look, while he looked as though he was suffering.

But there he was, and his words gave warning of a terrible danger, for all knew what a surprise of the Comanches would mean.

"Boy Pard, I'll explain to you," cried Tom Totten, and added:

"And then we must get down to business if you bring true news, and I'll wager high that you do."

"I saw five hundred braves just before noon, or, rather, Diablo Dick did, for he was with me, and where else can they be coming except here?" answered the boy, still mystified at the reception he had received.

"You see, Highflyer, all knew Diablo Dick had gone off on one of his lone hunts into the Indian country, and a cowboy came in from El Dorado Ranch and told how he had seen him, and Comanches watching his trail, and that set you off to warn him, and put the boys to betting upon your saving him, or getting back yourself, and Fred Foster here took all bets, and in your favor, so he wins, as soon as Diablo Dick shows up."

"Which he will do before morning; but you better be warning the ranches and mining camps, say I, instead of talking about bets," hotly said the boy.

"Why, a dozen men started on that duty as soon as they heard your first words, and we'll be ready, never fear, as redskins don't attack at night, but will at dawn."

"Now, where did you find Diablo Dick, for big money hangs on your answer?"

"Corralled in Blue Water Valley by a small band of redskins, and more to hear from."

"And you rescued him?"

"Well, I showed up with a shot or two, and he got a chance to save himself."

"And then?"

"The big band showed up, and we had a race for life, my horse was shot, but I got away, and Diablo Dick's horse carried us both off the field, for I was hurt a little."

"And then?"

"Well, Dick climbed to a cliff and saw

the whole force of redskins, and we pushed on until the horse began to play out, and he told me to come on and warn you all, while, to lessen the weight, he carried the guns and other traps, and is coming now, miles back, and I'll pay any man good money to take a horse in lead and go after him."

One promptly volunteered, and Tom Totten called out:

"You have heard the boy's story, gentlemen, so I turn over the money to Mr. Foster."

"Not until Diablo Dick shows up," shouted several voices, and Fred Foster called out:

"Keep the stakes until Diablo Dick arrives, to satisfy these gentlemen, Totten."

"Now, we'll give three cheers for this brave boy and Diablo Dick, and then there is work for us to do."

The cheers were given with a will, and the leading men hastily got together, and Fred Foster was promptly made the captain of the forces, and he as promptly accepted, while the Highflyer said:

"I'm not feeling just well, Mr. Foster, but I am here to help you."

"Get what rest you can, Sure Shot, and I will call you when I need you, for you are just the one I want as aide."

Then, in a way that revealed that he had had a military training, Fred Foster at once organized into companies, afoot and mounted, made the old mission the headquarters, dispatched couriers on fleet horses to warn all the camps and ranches, and have the men rally at the point of attack, while scouts were sent out to see just where the Comanches were.

By midnight the settlement was prepared to meet their cunning and cruel foes.

CHAPTER XVIII. IN CASE OF DEATH.

It was just midnight, and Fred Foster had announced that five hundred men were ready for duty, the outposts were guarded, and all was ready for the attack, when two horsemen were seen coming toward the inn.

"It's Diablo Dick and ther man who went fer him," cried a voice.

And he was right, for, dismounting from his horse, he said to Fred Foster:

"I'm glad ter see yer ready for 'em, sir, for thar is more than we want ter have catch us by surprise."

"And I am glad to see that you have come in, for I was anxious about you, fearing the Comanches might overtake you."

"No; I hoofed it mighty lively, but were not sorry ter see ther pard yer sent after me."

"The Highflyer did that."

"Whar is ther kid?"

"Asleep; and I will not disturb him until he is needed."

"That's right, fer he had a heavy fall, and his horse rolled over him, while I guess he hain't had any too much rest ther last few days in moving around ter save my scalp."

"He found you, though?"

"You bet he did; and when I needed him ther most."

"Yes, he saved my scalp, and—"

But Diablo Dick stopped suddenly, for it was on his lips to tell of Buffalo Bill, but he remembered just in time that he was to keep it a secret that they had seen him.

"What were you about to say, Diablo Dick?"

"Nothin', Pard Foster, any more than ter go on and tell that my horse saved us both."

"Is ther critter dead?"

"No, he's all right, or will be, with rest, though he was dead beat out when he arrived."

"Now, Diablo Dick, I have work for you to do."

"Just give me yer orders, cap'n, fer I sees they has put you in ther lead, and they war wise."

"I have sent men out to scout around and try and find the redskins."

"I met 'em, and they hain't goin' ter git hurt, or find redskins until ther reds finds them."

"That is just what I feared, and I wish you to pick what men you please, mount fresh horses, and go out and find where the Indians are and how approachin'."

"I'll do it, and you bet we has got ter be ready for 'em, fer they is coming for scalps, cap'n," and selecting his men, half a score in number, Diablo Dick rode off on the important duty to which he was assigned, while one and all among those who hated and feared him most, were glad that he had been sent on that very service, as they knew that there was no better man for the work in San Gabriel.

When he had Diablo Dick between the settlement and the Comanches, Fred Foster also felt relieved, for, whatever the faults of the desperado, he was a hero in battle, as he had proven time and again, and that he had been found corraled by Indians by Little Sure Shot was proof that one of the charges at least against him, that he was a renegade to his race, was false.

Fred Foster had appointed as his aides Tom Totten, Pete Pomeroy, and Nick Nubbins, and Little Sure Shot, when he should be needed, for all had seen the Highflyer sadly needed rest.

The Stranger Sport had also ordered that no more liquor should be sold to the men, as there were many who would seek to tone up on rum courage, and then become unruly, and the best men at once sided with their leader in this.

"I say, Captain Foster, I am going to turn over to you the bets you have won, so if I get killed you'll have your own, as it can be placed with your other boodle in my strong box," said Tom Totten, coming forward.

"If you wish, Totten, and there is no one to say the bets have not been fairly won," replied Foster.

There were some present who had bet and lost, and who would have been glad to have still fought against Totten giving over the money; but they knew that public opinion was against them, and in San Gabriel that meant a great deal, so they wisely remained silent.

Foster took the money, and calling Pete Pomeroy to him, said:

"Totten, in case of my death, all my winnings to-night are to be given to Pete Pomeroy here, and what else you hold of mine will belong to that boy, Little Sure Shot, for I will it so, and he and Pomeroy are to do as papers with my belongings direct them to do."

"I understand, sir, and will put all now in your locker in the strong box," said Tom Totten, adding:

"Then, in case I should fall, you will get your own, as they will, should you die."

"But, Mr. Foster, I have no claim on you, sir," cried the surprised young miner.

"I give you the claim of carrying out my wishes, should I be killed; but who is that rapid rider that is coming?" and Fred Foster turned to greet a horseman who was dashing up to the inn at a full run, as though he bore important news.

CHAPTER XIX. THE YOUNG SCOUT.

Certainly a sufferer for need of rest and from his bruises received through his fall, Little Sure Shot left Fred Foster to go to his own quarters and retire until his services were needed.

He got a good supper from the Chinese cook of the inn, and then started for his room.

But he did not reach there.

Something flashed through his mind that caused him to branch off toward the corral where the horses in use were kept.

He had there another good horse, a saddle, and bridle.

So to the corral he went, and Cowboy Charlie, who had charge of the animals there, at the boy's request, caught his horse and saddled and bridled him for him.

"I heerd yer was hunted, Highflyer, and rid hard ter bring in ther news o' ther coming Comanches, and I thinks yer should rest, not go riding out now in ther night," said Cowboy Charlie.

"I really need rest, Charlie, but then I think it would look mean for me to go to sleep and let others work, though I don't feel very lively."

"You see, Diablo Dick is not here, and may be overtaken by the Comanches, on foot, as he is, and I want to find out just where the reds are, and I guess I will."

With this explanation of his intention, Little Sure Shot took the trail from the corral, and which he knew would bring him into the one on which Diablo Dick was approaching, and at several miles distant from San Gabriel.

"I don't just know whether that fellow Nibs went after Diablo Dick, or would go much further than the last cabins if he did."

"He isn't over plucky, and he don't just love Dick, as I happen to know, so would let him get caught and take money for going all the same."

"No, I must find Diablo Dick myself, and then he can have a lift behind me back to the settlement, while we will also try and find out just where the reds are, and when they are going to strike San Gabriel, for it would be just like them to flank us, and then sweep over us."

Whether it was that Nibs forgot his ill-will toward Diablo Dick in the chance to get Little Sure Shot's money for going after him, or he was afraid to be alone on the trail, he certainly rode very rapidly and went a short distance beyond the last cabin.

Then he halted, and whatever his intention was, he suddenly heard a call on the trail ahead, and to his great relief, not in the Comanche tongue.

He recognized the voice, too, and called out:

"Ho, Pard Diablo Dick, I am looking for you, for the boy Highflyer sent me after you."

Diablo Dick had come along at a very fast pace for a man on foot, and though he had seen Nibs at a halt, he did not care then to accuse him of an intention to go no further, as he had a horse for him to ride, and he was very tired.

So he grasped the rein of the led horse, and said:

"Ther boy git in, then?"

"Yes, and Fred Foster was made cap'n, and we are all ready to fight the Comanches."

"Good!"

"It will be no surprise, then."

"Did ther kid pay you for coming after me?"

"Yes," was the reluctant reply of Nibs.

"He said he would."

"Well, he won't, for I do the payin'."

"Now let us ride fer it!"

Leading the way, Diablo Dick pressed rapidly on toward San Gabriel, and thus he passed the trail which the Highflyer was then on coming from the corral, before it came out into the main one.

As it was night, and he could not see the fresh trails, the young rescuer continued on, riding rapidly for several miles.

As he drew rein in ascending a ridge, he begun to feel anxious about Diablo Dick, and, knowing that the Comanches, if advancing, would have scouts well ahead, and he must be cautious, he decided to reconnoitre well before pushing on, as he was liable to run upon a red foe at any moment.

Ascending to the top of the ridge, he looked over, for he knew that a barren plain lay beyond, and was a couple of miles across.

Hardly had he looked down upon the plain when his ears heard the sound of hoofs approaching.

Could it be that Diablo Dick had in some way gotten a mount, he wondered.

Nearer drew the sound, and the young Highflyer brought his rifle around to meet friend or foe.

The ring of the hoofs told him that they were iron-shod.

It was not an Indian scout then upon his pony, he felt sure.

Nearer still came the sound, and then in the darkness down the slope came the shadowy form of a horse and rider.

CHAPTER XX.

"IT IS BUFFALO BILL."

Knowing that the country in that direction toward the lands of the Comanches had neither miners nor ranches, and that few from San Gabriel ever ventured out on that trail, and certainly would not be likely to be out on that night, Little Sure Shot could only regard the coming horseman as either Diablo Dick, who in some way had secured a mount, or as a redskin scout who was riding a shod horse.

But there came the horseman up the trail crossing the ridge, and soon he would have him at his mercy.

Nearer and nearer he came, and the boy stood with rifle ready, a small pine sheltering him, and his eyes riveted upon the horseman, now within easy revolver range.

"It is no Indian," muttered the Highflyer.

Then he added:

"He is riding in a hurry."

"He must be Diablo Dick—no—it is Buffalo Bill."

The last few words were uttered aloud.

The horseman came to a quick halt, and his stern voice asked:

"Who calls Buffalo Bill?"

"I do, sir."

"I am Little Sure Shot," and the boy stepped out from the shelter of the tree.

"Ah, my boy pard, if you have gotten no further than this, I fear the settlement of San Gabriel is doomed," sadly said the scout.

"But I have gotten further, sir; I have been to San Gabriel, and the whole settlement is under arms."

"Thank God for that!"

"The Comanches are in much larger force than I supposed, and are flanking the settlement, to strike the ranches first and sweep everything before them to their villages, killing and burning as they go."

"I had half feared that, sir."

"But what are you doing here, lad?"

"Looking for my pard, Diablo Dick."

"Have you seen him, sir?"

"No."

"What has become of him?"

The Highflyer told of their escape, and his going on ahead, when Diablo Dick discovered the Indians were over five hundred strong.

"They are more than that, boy pard."

"But it was wise in Diablo Dick to send you on ahead."

"I have seen nothing of him, and he, being on foot, would have seen and known me, if I had passed him."

"I think he is a man who can take care of himself, and now you must ride back at full speed to San Gabriel."

"Yes, sir; but you?"

"I will not go, now I have met you, for I do not wish to be seen or known there, and you must again keep it secret as to having seen me."

"I will, sir; but if you don't go, you will have a lookout for Diablo Dick?"

"I have no return now for a most important duty, for those Indians may be beaten off from San Gabriel, but they will strike for the San Lucia settlement, I feel sure, and do a world of damage there."

"I cannot warn the settlement, but I can meet the Comanches with a force of soldiers who are awaiting a bugle-call from me to strike a blow."

"You are a wonderful man, Buffalo Bill, and I felt a certain awe of you as you came up, I was so sure you were dead."

"Why so, my lad?"

"We—Diablo Dick and myself—saw the Comanches completely surround your camp and charge in upon it, so supposed you had been killed."

"No; I built that fire to fool them, and left the camp by one of those gullies, getting out before they began their surround."

"I have been watching them ever since, until I discovered their intention was to flank San Gabriel, and then I started on the trail to inform the people, though I did not care to be seen there, and am very glad I met you."

"Now, don't spare your horse, and tell your leader that the Comanches have gone down the Bad Lands Valley, and will flank the range and strike the ranches about dawn, pushing through San Gabriel and out this trail toward their country again."

"I'll do it, sir."

"And, remember, do not tell how you got your information."

"No, sir; but won't I see you again some time?"

"Yes, we will meet again, but do not recognize me until I do you."

"Good-night, and don't spare your spurs, for the men must meet the Comanches before they strike the ranches."

With this Buffalo Bill wheeled and rode back down the slope, while Little Sure Shot was off like an arrow from its bow on his mission.

He had gone about a couple of miles, when suddenly in the darkness rang out the stern command:

"Halt, there, and tell who you are."

"We have you covered!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE HIGHFLYER IN TIME.

"I know you, Diablo Dick."

Such was the answer of Little Sure Shot, as he reined his horse to a halt in obedience to the threatening command.

He had been startled for an instant, and visions of death and disaster to the San Gabriel settlement flashed through his mind, should he be killed or captured by road agents or other outlaws.

But ere Diablo Dick had spoken half a dozen words, the boy knew his voice,

and he gave a sigh of relief as he answered the man sharply.

"And I should know that voice, for it should belong to the Young Highflyer, only he's certainly in his room at the inn."

"No, I am not, for I am right here on the trail, and I've got news, too."

"Bless ther kid fer a dandy."

"But how in thunder did you git here?" and Diablo Dick walked up to the boy's horse.

"Why, I didn't go to bed, that was all, and concluded to look you up, as I was not so dead sure of Nibs."

"I missed you some way, and I was just riding back to San Gabriel with news of the greatest importance, Dick."

"Well, Nibs did pick me up, and Fred Foster, who is captain, and they could not have made a better one, sent me out with the picked men on a scent, and we heerd you comin', and laid fer yer."

"But whar has you been, kid, and what's yer news?"

"I have been quite a distance, and I have found out that the redskins are nearly a thousand mounted warriors, and they will not attack this way, but have gone down the Bad Lands Valley, to round up the ranches and just sweep over San Gabriel, unless we check them before they strike."

"This is indeed news, Little Sure Shot," said Diablo Dick seriously, and he then asked in a low tone:

"Where did you get it?"

"From the man we both thought had been killed," came the whispered response.

"Buffalo Bill?"

"Yes."

"How did he escape?"

"Just saw the trap and left it before the Indians sprung it."

"Well, where did you see him?"

"Back on the trail a couple of miles, and he was coming to warn San Gabriel, but he told me to do so, and as before, he said his presence here must not be known."

"All right, it shall be so."

"And he'll be around somewhere with soldiers, if the redskins are too much for us; but of course I cannot report this after his request."

"No."

"But do you now push the breeze, with all speed, to let Cap'n Foster know, and tell him I'll leave three men here to guard the trail and report to him if the reds change their mind, or attack from both directions."

"Yes, and you?"

"I'll push down the range with the rest of my men, to be down among the ranches when Foster and his men get there; and it will be well if he can reach the Hacienda del Muerte some time before the Comanches, for there is the place to surprise them."

"Yes, and I will guide them there by a cut in the range, which I know well, and will save several miles."

"I'm off," and with this Little Sure Shot went off like the wind, while Diablo Dick said to his pards:

"Now, that kid is a wonder, fer I know he has ridden four hundred miles in the last four days, has fought Injuns, and killed several, has hed his horse shot under him, and been badly hurt to boot, and yet here he is to-night as chipper as a bird and hardly able to sit in his saddle."

The men agreed with Diablo Dick in all that he said of the youth, who was riding at breakneck speed toward San Gabriel, for he knew well that moments were precious then.

On, on he went, risking his neck by

going over rugged land here and there at the same speed, until at last he swept by the first cabins of the settlement, and then on up the ridge to where loomed up the old mission, and where Fred Foster had established his headquarters.

It was Little Sure Shot's rapid coming that had attracted the attention of Foster and the others, and fearing a courier with bad news, he stepped forward to greet him as he sprang from his horse.

As the light of the saloon fell full upon the boy, Fred Foster, in utter amazement, recognized the boy whom he then believed fast asleep in the Old Mansion Inn.

"Why, Little Sure Shot!"

"Yes, sir."

"Where on earth did you come from?"

"Off on the trail, sir, and I've got news for you."

The boy then hastily told the story of his discovery, but did not tell how he had found out the change in the Indians' plans, and one and all cried:

"Bravo for the little Highflyer!"

"If he hadn't brought in the news we'd have been caught napping, after all."

CHAPTER XXII.

AT THE OLD HACIENDA.

It took very little time for Fred Foster to decide to change his front, and go with his men to the new point of attack.

He believed all that the Boy Highflyer had reported to him, even to the number of Indians being larger than had been first supposed.

Though amazed at the indomitable nerve and endurance of the boy, he had no time to talk about it then, but at once accepted his services to guide the men through the nearer cut to the deserted hacienda, which Diablo Dick had named as the best place to give battle to the Indians.

He knew that no one in the settlement, unless it was Diablo Dick, knew the whole country about better than did the boy, and not a soul offered an objection to Highflyer going as the guide.

Mounted upon a fresh horse, the youth rode to the front as soon as Fred Foster had mounted and his men were collecting about him.

Half a hundred men were left at the inn to defend it if the Indians sent a force that way, and, strongly built as a fort, there was no danger of its being captured without a long and hard fight.

Through the timber along the range, through canyons and over ridges, the boy guide led the men, never once at fault, in spite of the midnight darkness.

At length they came out of the range into the bright starlight of early dawn, and there sat Diablo Dick awaiting them.

"Well done, kid, if you guided 'em through," he said, with evident pride in the young guide's achievement, and then to Fred Foster he continued:

"My men are on the watch, sir, and the Hacienda del Muerte is the place to strike the Comanches, and there is room enough for all of us to hide and to give 'em a surprise."

"Once they pass the hacienda, the ranches is all before them to raid, and all the damage they wishes in the valley."

"Lead on to the hacienda, Diablo Dick, for there we must strike them, and they will not be long in coming."

"No, Mr. Foster, they think they will surprise the settlement, and will try to

strike the first ranch just at dawn," said the Highflyer, and his opinion was worth a great deal among these men.

The old hacienda was reached, the horses were concealed within the walled plaza, and the men, dismounted, took up a position where they could deliver a volley of three hundred rifles, then mount and charge with their revolvers in hand, and if the Comanches walked into the trap, great would be the slaughter and most demoralizing their surprise.

Hardly had the men gotten into position, when a low, rumbling sound fell upon every ear.

It sounded like distant thunder, but all knew it to be the sound of hundreds of hoofs.

Louder and louder came the sound, and soon, out of the darkness of the valley, climbing the hill, many abreast now, as they were preparing to dash upon the nearest ranch, not far away, came the dark forms of ponies and riders.

The gray of dawn was lighting up the scene, and the Indian horsemen were within a hundred yards of the long, crumbling wall of the old hacienda, when the stern, clear voice of Fred Foster cried:

"Ready all!"

"Fire!"

Three hundred rifles flashed within the space of twenty seconds.

Three hundred leaden bullets went tearing into human and brute flesh, and horses and ponies went down by the score.

The flashes of the many rifles had lighted up the scene and revealed to the redskins the trap they had run upon.

It also revealed to the whites a large force of horsemen coming on out of the valley, larger by far than they had supposed, and Fred Foster felt that he must not send his men out into the open to charge against such odds.

He would hold the hacienda, for it was the key to the valley beyond, and the Comanches could be forced back, he hoped, and not gain the valley and the ranches.

Once past the hacienda, and the ranches would be at their mercy, and large herds of fine horses and cattle would be driven before them up the range, through the settlement of San Gabriel, and all would be destruction and death.

"Load your rifles, men, and fight from where you are."

"I will hold fifty mounted men to beat back with their revolvers any force of redskins that may attempt to pass us."

"Diablo Dick, you will command the mounted men."

"Are you ready?"

"Fire!" And the gallant leader gave his orders with the utmost coolness, and the rifles rattled incessantly, the bullets tearing into the mass of crowded Comanches, who were momentarily stunned by the blow dealt them.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BUFFALO BILL TO THE RESCUE.

In spite of now beholding the numbers against them in the full glare of day double what they had expected, and seeing that the redskins did not fall back, but steadily held their ground, the men of San Gabriel had come to feel that the first victory was with them, that they had dealt their foes a severe blow, and they had full confidence in the skill and nerve of their leader, Fred Foster.

But the behavior of the redskins showed to the experienced eyes of the young Highflyer, who certainly under-

stood Indian nature and actions thoroughly, that they did not intend to retreat, and he said quickly:

"Mr. Foster, those redskins have got still another force near, for they have sent couriers off to bring them up, and it is well we took possession of this old hacienda, for there are enough of them to have eaten us up, though it might have been a tough meal for them, I admit."

"It was Diablo Dick who brought us here, you know, Little Sure Shot—where is he?"

"Here, cap'n, I've been taking in them reds."

"And what do you make of them, Diablo Dick?" asked Foster.

"We don't see all of them, sir, for they have another lot somewhere, and have runners fer them."

"They hain't far away, nuther, and I guess was goin' ter round up ther valley by another trail, only they'll all come this way now, as they has seen they didn't surprise nobody, and we is ready fer them."

"It is due to you and this gallant boy that San Gabriel was not surprised," said Fred Foster, and he added:

"And had we been not a soul in this valley would have escaped massacre."

Diablo Dick and the Highflyer looked at each other.

Each felt that the one who really deserved the praise was Buffalo Bill, who had silenced them.

Of him they could not speak, and yet each of the two felt that he had been watching the Indians when he had come to their rescue, and would have quickly informed San Gabriel of its threatened danger.

The boy was aware that Buffalo Bill knew of a military force near, and was its guide, while he had then gone to take the soldiers to a spot where they could protect the settlement of San Lucia, and strike the Indians a severe blow upon their retreat.

At least such the scout had told Highflyer, it will be recalled, as his intention.

The young miner Pete Pomeroy stood near Fred Foster, and he had a cool and very level head, and he made an excellent standby in the time of need, while he was glad to do all in his power for the man who had befriended him by saving his money, and at the same time making him his partner in the games that had won so large a sum.

In fact he believed that Fred Foster had saved his life, as he had since been told that the Card Sharp had intended to kill him.

As Fred Foster thus stood with the three near him upon whom he could wholly depend, there came into sight in the distance a large band of mounted braves, riding at a full gallop to join their comrades.

"That settles it—it's a case of siege, and there are now fifteen hundred of them to fight ef there is one," said Diablo Dick.

"Yes, it looks as though we had to fight for our lives, instead of protecting the valley."

"Tom Totten at the Mission will also be besieged, and the separate parties scattered here and there will have to fight big odds."

"This is a sudden, unexpected and wonderful uprising of the Indians, and I am surprised that some of the scouts at the fort did not discover it," said Fred Foster, speaking in an unmoved way, though it was evident he felt that the chances were all against them and the entire settlement.

Diablo Dick and Little Sure Shot again glanced at each other knowingly, when Fred Foster spoke of the scouts at the fort not discovering the uprising of the Indians; but they would not betray that the Chief of Scouts did know, and was not then very far away.

"I think there are soldiers over on the San Lucia trail, Mr. Foster, and I can ride there in search of them if you wish," said Little Sure Shot.

Fred Foster turned quickly toward him and said: "If you know where there are any soldiers go and get them, if you are able to make the ride."

"I can make the ride all right, sir—see, they are moving to the attack."

"Yes, they are coming."

"Ready all, men, and fire with deadly aim and coolness."

"Do not waste a shot."

"Don't delay a moment, Highflyer, but be off," said Foster.

Little Sure Shot started toward his horse, when suddenly the voice of Diablo Dick caused him to quickly come to a standstill.

"Hold, Boy Pard!"

"There comes a friend in need, and there is Boys in Blue back of him!"

All looked in the direction indicated by Diablo Dick and beheld a single horseman dashing along a distant range, and just coming out of some heavy timber was a large party of soldiers.

"It is Buffalo Bill," cried the boy, springing to the side of Diablo Dick and speaking in a hoarse whisper.

"You bet it is," was the low response.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE HIDDEN HAND.

Buffalo Bill was there.

A friend in the time of need.

Though believed by Little Sure Shot to be twenty or more miles away on the San Lucia trail, he suddenly appeared half a mile in the rear of the Indian army.

Mounted upon his splendid black horse, which had served Diablo Dick and the Highflyer so well the day before, he was riding at a run, upright in his saddle, a revolver in his right hand, a splendid picture of a warrior tried and true going into battle.

Behind him a couple of hundred yards, emerging from the heavy timber on the range, came a force of several hundred cavalry, while unlimbering on the hill and going into action were four pieces of light artillery, while back among the trees other soldiers were also seen moving to the front.

Not until the wild yell of the men in the Hacienda did the Indians suspect the presence of a foe on their flank, almost in their rear!

Then, as they were moving slowly, their ponies in a walk, in one solid mass upon the Hacienda, surprised at the shouts of their foes, so full of joy, they turned to discover that their game was blocked, that they must fight hard for life.

As the thrill of amazement and dread ran through them, the four brass six-pounders flashed together, the deep roar echoing and re-echoing through the mountains, and Buffalo Bill's shells burst right in the crowded columns of red humanity.

Again, the guns spoke, and this time grape and cannister was fired and tore through the ranks of horses and braves.

Again spoke the guns, again with shells, and while the echoing of the bursting iron was still heard, there came into line a couple of hundred of mounted infantry, and volley after volley was poured upon the braves, now battling to

break past the Hacienda and fly for their retreats, spreading death and destruction as they went.

Recoiling under the deadly fire of the men in the Hacienda, the Indians were forced to turn back and retreat as they had come, the only course left open to them, unless they swept still further away from their homes.

So back through the valley they surged, making a hot fight of it, and a determined stand to carry off their dead and wounded.

But out of the Hacienda rallied the men of St. Gabriel, led by Fred Foster, and with Diablo Dick, Little Sure Shot, and Pete Pomeroy close by his side, while the artillery again opened from the hill, and Buffalo Bill was seen guiding the cavalry into position to make a charge.

With wild yells the men of San Gabriel rushed upon what was now the rear of the Indian force, the guns thundered death into their midst, the Infantry poured fatal volleys upon braves and horses, and down upon them with a rush came two hundred troopers with revolvers and swords.

Then it became a stampede, the dead and wounded were forgotten, and nearly fifteen hundred warriors were flying for life back through Bad Lands Valley, and hotly pursued by their victors, orders being given for the whole force of soldiers to press them hard into their very country.

And the field they left behind them was a sad one to behold, for a hundred braves lay dead or dying there, twice as many ponies had fallen, and both soldiers and settlers were scattered about cold in death, or suffering from severe wounds.

But what had not the result been, San Gabriel and San Lucia settlements saved from the torch and scalping knife, and all felt that the victory had been cheaply purchased.

And but for the aid of the soldiers, how different the story, and Fred Foster frankly said to the captain left behind with his Infantry company and several surgeons:

"We would have been wiped out of existence but for you, Mainhall."

"We would never have gotten here but for Buffalo Bill, the Chief of Scouts."

"Ten days ago he reported to the colonel that he wanted a large force, cavalry, infantry mounted, and four guns, for quick work in the field, and officers and men blessed him, or worse, for making us play hide and seek about the mountains and never once seeing an Indian."

"Only Major Brewer, besides Buffalo Bill, knew what was up, and last night the scout nearly rode us all to death, just pushing for San Lucia, then back over our trail until we got here and found one force of four hundred men facing nearly two thousand Indians, who were besieging you in that old hacienda."

"Then we knew what Buffalo Bill had been about, why he had kept us dodging about the mountains, hiding from the Indians and striking at the proper time, and winning a grand victory."

"Now you have my story, Capt. Foster, so what are you doing here, and dressed like a parson; for I thought you were East on furlough, as all of us at the fort did?"

"I don't mind telling you now, Mainhall, as my work is accomplished, and you find me here in command of a band of settlers."

"I have been on secret service for Buffalo Bill."

"Ah! Buffalo Bill's Hidden Hand?"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SOLDIER SHADOWER.

"Yes, it is Buffalo Bill's Hidden Hand, Mainhall."

"But where is the Chief of Scouts?" asked Capt. Fred Foster, for such was his army rank.

"Gone in pursuit, of course, but he told me to say to you that he would return to San Gabriel to-night to see you."

"All right. I will have news for him."

"Just what he said he would have for you."

"Now, we must make a hospital at this old hacienda, and I will be glad to have your men aid mine in gathering up the wounded, Indians and all, and burying the dead."

"I will, of course, remain here with my company until the wounded get able to be moved to the fort."

"But who is that boy that is wounded there?"

"An hour ago I could not have told you more than that I knew him as Little Sure Shot, the Highflyer."

"But now you can tell me more?"

"Yes, he is Col. Farrar's son, Frank."

"My God! The boy we all believed killed by Indians years ago?"

"The same boy, Mainhall."

"Yes, I see the resemblance now to the handsome little fellow that I knew when he was eight years of age."

"Where has he been all these years?"

"I do not know, more than that I believe he has lived among the Indians, lived in various mining camps, has been a general rover about the frontier, and is known here as Little Sure Shot, the Highflyer, a name he certainly deserves, for he is the cleverest, coolest, most daring little imp that I ever met, and we owe it to him and to Diablo Dick that San Gabriel was not surprised."

"Yes, Buffalo Bill told me he had found a man and boy from San Gabriel, whom he sent with news that the Indians were to attack the settlement."

"Ah! Now I see how they knew so much, but said so little."

"He told them not to speak of seeing him; but where is the man?"

"Diablo Dick."

"Yes, that is what Buffalo Bill said the boy called his pard."

"Somewhere about."

"Don't let him escape, Foster."

"Escape, why?"

"Do you know him?"

"As a man who is greatly feared in the settlement, and has killed a number of men, while he wears the name of Diablo Dick, the Desperado."

"But I have found him to be a square, brave fellow, and the men whom he has killed he has shot only in difficulties where he did not seem to deserve censure, and they were the very worst characters of the place, and it was a good thing to get rid of them."

"Do you know the man, Mainhall?"

"Well, Buffalo Bill thinks that he does."

"I'll leave him to tell you when he comes."

"Only do not let the man Diablo Dick leave the settlement."

"I will look him up and keep an eye on him, for if Buffalo Bill's Hidden Hand is in this also, I will not neglect aiding him all in my power."

"Yes, he wants the man, I know."

"But is the boy badly wounded?"

"Fortunately, no; the bullet glanced on a rib over the breast, and is slight; but he is about used up from loss of blood, want of rest for days, and over-exertion."

"He will come round all right."

"I hope so."

"But you think there is no doubt of the boy's being little Frank Farrar?"

"No more than that I am Fred Foster, captain United States Army."

"Why, he has his mother's miniature about his neck, and his initials and the United States shield in india ink on his left arm, done by a sailor when the colonel was going to sea from San Francisco to New York with his wife and child."

"Yes, I remember the initials, and how proud the little fellow used to be to show them and the shield."

"Does he know who he is?"

"I am inclined to believe that he does not."

"When Buffalo Bill comes we will have a talk with him, for I don't mind telling you now, Mainhall, why I came to San Gabriel five months ago."

"I should certainly like to know, Foster."

"Well, Buffalo Bill—"

"The scout's Hidden Hand again?"

"Yes, and a hand that has accomplished a world of good."

"That I will affirm."

"But to your story."

"Buffalo Bill never did believe, from all told him, that Capt. Leffingwell, Sergt. Lester, the six soldiers, scout, and the little boy, Frank, whom his father allowed to go on that gold-hunting expedition, had all been massacred."

"It is true that the way the news came to the fort that Sergt. Lester had once been a road agent, and he planned with his old outlaw comrades to massacre the party, after they had found the gold they went after, was not doubted by any one."

"It came too straight from the outlaw we captured and hanged, and as Sergt. Lester was seen afterward by a dozen people who knew him, why, there was no room for doubt."

"But Buffalo Bill having learned also in the camps that Capt. Hugh Leffingwell was also said to have turned traitor with the sergeant, he came to me to aid him in getting at the whole truth as far as we could."

"Knowing that I was a Texan ranger and scout before my appointment to the army, and that Leffingwell was my bosom friend, he told me of the ugly rumors, revived after years, and asked me to aid him in shadowing down the mystery, finding Sergt. Lester, and seeing if we could not discover a number of the outlaws in this country."

"So I got a furlough for the purpose, the secret being known but to the colonel, Buffalo Bill, and myself, and coming to San Gabriel I entered upon the duty of a detective, playing the part of a gentleman sport, and I can vouch for several of the worst men on this frontier having been called from this vale of tears."

"Now you know just why I am here, and when Buffalo Bill compares notes with me, it will be seen that we have made some important discoveries, and done some good work."

"Now I'll go and look up Diablo Dick."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE LOST MAN.

The wounded redskins were borne as gently into the old hacienda, to be cared for by the surgeons, as were the soldiers and settlers.

The dead were placed to one side, enveloped in blankets, the Indians apart, then the settlers, then the soldiers, and then men were busy digging the graves where they were to find their final resting place, friends and foes, all alike with the seal of death upon them.

"Well, Little Sure Shot, how do you feel now?" asked Captain Fred Foster, going up to where the boy lay apart from all others.

"Hungry, sir."

The officer laughed, and said:

"You should have some dinner, but I am glad you have had a good sleep."

"I thought I was dead, I slept so."

"But I'll be all right in a day or two, sir."

"I feel that you will."

"It was a grand victory."

"It was, indeed, thanks to Buffalo Bill bringing the soldiers up in the nick of time."

The boy started.

"Is he here, sir?"

"Who?"

"Buffalo Bill."

"He has gone with the pursuit, but will return to-night."

"When he comes, I hope he'll tell you something which Diablo Dick and I could not, for we don't deserve so much credit as you and the settlers gave me."

"Well, we'll talk over that when the scout comes."

"But, Sure Shot, I wish to ask you a question?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know who you are?"

"I don't believe that I do, sir, though sometimes it seems I do, and then all that comes before me appears like it was a dream."

"Where have you been the past eight years?"

"Since I can remember I was in the Comanche village; but a white man escaped from them and took me with him."

"Then he joined a band of Mexican outlaws, but I didn't wish to kill, and so I ran away, and I lived with a rich Mexican for a year or so, and one night his home was raided by Indians and he and his whole family were killed, but I got away."

"Then I drifted through the country and back to the frontier, and into the mining camps, until I struck San Gabriel, and I guess I've been a rather tough citizen, though I wouldn't do a mean act, or draw my gun to kill, unless I had to, for even a boy must take care of himself out here, as you well know, Mr. Foster."

"That he must, Sure Shot; but you have a noble heart, and have been a mighty good boy, as I know."

"Now tell me where you got that gold locket you wear, and which I saw when the surgeon dressed your wound?"

"I don't know, sir, where I got it; but I do know it is the likeness of one I know I used to call mother, and a hard time I had of it keeping the reds from stealing it from me; but I've got it yet, and I'd give a great deal to find my mother."

"I know your mother, Frank."

"Frank, sir? Why, that is my right name."

"Do you know your other name?"

"No, sir."

"Well, Frank, when Buffalo Bill comes to-night he will have a story to relate which you will like to hear, and I do not think you will have to live in Wild West mining camps any more."

"And Buffalo Bill will see me to-night, sir?"

"Yes, Frank."

"And tell me a story?"

"He will tell you the truth about yourself, Little Sure Shot. But I must go and find Diablo Dick. I am particularly anxious to see him."

"Why, Mr. Foster, he is gone."

"Gone? Where to, lad?"

"I don't know, sir."

"How do you know, then, that he is gone?"

"He brought me here, sir, you know, when I was wounded."

"Yes, yes, lad; that I know."

"Then he went away, but came back and told me good-by."

"What did he say?"

"He said that he had done all he could; that he was no longer useful in San Gabriel, and had work to do before he died, so would start at once upon the trail, for there were foes here who would like to see him die on the gallows."

"Then he told me, as he did not expect ever to see me again, to thank you for your kindness to him; to thank Tom Totten, also, and to say to Buffalo Bill that he would never forget that he owed him his life."

"With that he wrung my hand, and, leaping into his saddle, rode away."

"That was an hour ago?"

"Yes, sir; and I was sorry to see him go, for he was a noble man at heart, Mr. Foster, if the men here did fear him and call him a desperado."

"Well, Sure Shot, I will send you your dinner; then go to sleep again. To-night we will go to the inn, and when Buffalo Bill comes you shall see him."

"Now I must try and find Diablo Dick."

And Captain Foster immediately started upon his search for the missing man.

Not one of the settlers had seen him since just after the fight ended; then several had observed him mount his horse and ride away, none knew where.

Late in the afternoon, the wounded having been cared for and the dead buried, Captain Foster, with the men he had kept with him, started for San Gabriel, leaving Captain Mainhall in command of the hacienda, where the wounded were.

He had asked his brother officer to send Buffalo Bill on to the San Gabriel Inn, as he wished to see him; then, with Little Sure Shot able to ride, he started for the settlement, Pete Pomeroy riding on the other side of the youth to lend any aid if needed.

Tom Totten was delighted at the result of the battle, and loud in his praise of the fighters, soldiers and settlers.

Diablo Dick had told him all, he said, and had praised Captain Foster, Little Sure Shot, and others for their splendid pluck.

"And, where is Diablo Dick, for he actually behaved like a hero?" said Fred Foster, still not known to those about him as an army officer.

"Why, he drew his money out of my strong-box, and went away, he said, into old Mexico. He took with him a pack horse heavily laden with supplies and outfit, as though bound upon a long trail."

"When did he start out?"

"Just after dinner."

"Which way, Totten?"

"I only know that he left here by the trail toward the Indian country."

"Then I must give him up, for it is night now, and Buffalo Bill will not find him here when he comes," decided the captain, and he added to himself:

"Buffalo Bill meant to make him a prisoner. I am glad that Diablo has escaped."

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONCLUSION.

Little Sure Shot the Highflyer was put to bed in a cot in Captain Foster's own room, it being the best in the old mission, and the officer retiring soon after, the night passed without disturbance other than that of the men making merry.

ver the escape of the settlement from bath and destruction.

When Captain Foster aroused the next morning he found Little Sure Shot awake and as chipper as a bird.

"I'm hungry," was his first remark, at which the captain laughed, and assured the lad that he should have as good a breakfast as the inn afforded.

Then Sure Shot asked if Buffalo Bill had arrived.

This the captain did not know, but when he went into the plaza he saw the splendid form of the scout, as he stood talking to Tom Totten.

"There's Fred Foster now," announced Totten.

The scout stepped briskly forward, and the two men warmly grasped hands.

"I have but just arrived, and was going in to breakfast, for I've been in the saddle since yesterday without a square meal," explained the scout.

"We'll breakfast together, Bill; but remember, I am known to no one here as an army officer, nor do I care to be, at present, at least."

"The secret still holds, sir," returned Cody; "but have you got my man, Diablo Dick?"

"No. He skipped just after the fight, and has gone off toward the Indian country, Totten tells me."

"I much regret this escape, captain, for Dick, as he called himself here, was the leader of the outlaw band that massacred Captain Leffingwell and his party, all save the boy—the colonel's little son, Frank—who went along with the expedition, you know."

"I am indeed sorry to hear this of Diablo Dick, for I liked the fellow, and he certainly acted like a hero."

"I also liked him, but I am disappointed that we could not have secured him, for he alone knows the secret of that massacre, and I doubt if he can ever be found again."

"So do I. But you say the colonel's little boy was not killed with the others?"

"No; for I have seen the boy within the past thirty hours, and though a waif of the camps. I recognized him by his striking likeness to both his parents. He is here in San Gabriel unless he has gone off with Diablo Dick."

"No, Cody, he is wounded, and is now up in my own room. You are right, too, about his being the colonel's son, as I can soon prove to you, having made the same discovery that you did."

"Good! Then there is no mistake?"

"None."

"Then I am more pleased than I can express, but, as I have said, I deeply regret that Diablo has got beyond reach, for he alone could have cleared Captain Leffingwell and Sergeant Lester of the charge against them, which so few know, of siding with the outlaws and taking that treasure of gold they were sent to bring in."

"No one who knew Leffingwell or the sergeant should for a moment believe the charge; but it is a mystery never to be solved now, I fear."

"So I fear also; in fact, I expect we must give up trying to solve it, unless the boy can tell us something."

"He remembers nothing. He was but seven then, you know, and all his early past seems to be entirely blotted from his memory."

"Then that ends it all, and the unsolved affair must remain so to the end."

"Now, let us go in to breakfast, and then I wish to see that gallant boy the men here call the Highflyer," said Buffalo Bill.

The meal was enjoyed; then Captain

Foster led the way to his room, where the hungry Little Sure Shot was impatiently awaiting his return.

The meeting between the scout and the boy was a most cordial one, and the two and Captain Foster had a long talk—the lad forgetting all about his still unserved breakfast.

But, though convinced of his identity, and with every proof verified, the boy did not recall the years before he remembered being in the Indian village. All prior to that was a blank to him.

Then, too, he would not believe in the evil of his friend, Diablo Dick, and boldly averred his friendship for him.

"He may have gone wicked," the camp waif said, "but he is not bad at heart, I am positive of that. I will never believe that he killed men—committed murder—just to get gold; he was too good to do that, and I hope to find him some day."

To the fort with Buffalo Bill and Captain Foster went Little Sure Shot, and his meeting with his father, the colonel, was a most affecting one, while the boy at once became the hero of the fort, and seemed delighted with his life among the soldiers.

As for the fate of Captain Leffingwell and his party, it was not spoken of, all being willing to let the dead past bury its dead.

And so time wore on, with Pete Romero, the young miner, returning to his Eastern home, possessed of a small fortune, Tom Totten still keeping the "Win and Lose Inn" at San Gabriel, Captain Fred Foster, no longer the Stranger Sport, going to another fort on regular duty, and Little Sure Shot, under the teaching of the great scout, Buffalo Bill, becoming more famed as Little Sure Shot, the Buckskin Highflyer.

THE END.

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